

A Midland Tour 1836

*Notes of a Short Tour Through the Midland Counties of Ireland in The Summer of 1836, with Observations on The Condition of The Peasantry.*

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ON many accounts Ireland deserves to be visited and known. Its condition is a strange anomaly. United to Great Britain, its eight millions are our weakness rather than our strength. It deluges our cities with paupers, and yet remains full to overflowing. Although forming part of the wealthiest empire in the world, the mass of its inhabitants have scarcely the necessaries of life.

Notwithstanding the influence of a large Protestant establishment, it remains, 300 years after the Reformation, more Papal than the north of Italy, and, till within 20 years, almost as destitute of the Scriptures as Portugal or Spain. Surrounding barbarism tempts its aristocracy to emigrate ; civil discord drives out its thriving peasantry ; and starvation ejects its paupers : yet their numbers and their miseries continue to multiply. The government can get from them scarcely any revenue, clergymen have lost their tithes, and proprietors tremble for their rents, because the occupiers of the soil have scarcely food and clothing. This wide-spread penury, in a fertile land and favourable climate, with all the irritation which necessarily accompanies it, disturbs the island with intestine dissensions ; leads to outrage after outrage ; perplexes successive governments ; gives an unwholesome influence to agitators ; and threatens the safety of the empire. Its peasantry are often said, notwithstanding their privations, to be the finest in the world ; and for intellect, vivacity, and warmth of affection, perhaps they are unequalled : and yet they worship the wafer, do penance on their knees round holy wells, put their consciences in the keeping of a priest, who may, perhaps, be a blasphemer and a drunkard, and suppose that to be touched, near death, on their ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and fingers, with the oil which an ecclesiastic has blessed, is a passport to heaven. Such, at least, are the reports which reach us across the Channel. I wished, therefore, to see for myself the real condition of the people ; whether they are miserable or not, whether they are advancing to civilization and plenty, to order, religion, and happiness, or doomed to still deeper degradation ; what may be learned from their virtues, or what can be done to mitigate their sorrows. I did not expect that the investigation of a few weeks would enable me to solve these questions ; nor do I hope that the following short account will much help another to solve them. But my visit has enabled me to understand some points of their condition, and to judge better of what I may in future hear or read upon others : and if this account may communicate to any of my readers the interest which I feel myself in the welfare of that suffering and amiable people, it will not have been written in vain.

My time being exceedingly limited, I was obliged, in determining our tour, to put out of sight the prosperity of the North, with the penury of the West and South. We could visit neither Belfast nor Londonderry, neither Kerry nor Connemara. We were obliged to renounce the pleasure of treading on the Giant's Causeway, or exploring the shores of Killarney. We could not see the Atlantic beat upon the rocks of Moher, or even visit Achill. A humbler mid-

land tour was all which I could undertake. This would, however, let us see the average condition of the people. The nakedness and superstition of the West and South, with the prosperity and religious light of the North, being beyond our view, we should still see the moral and physical characteristics of the greatest part of the island. . . . we could visit Kingscourt, we should cross the Shannon, learn something of the state of Galway and of Clare . . . pass through the most turbulent counties of Ireland—Limerick, Tipperary, and Kilkenny ; and, finally, forget for a while the wide-spread wilderness of mud cabins, to solace ourselves with the summer verdure of Ovoca and the Dargle.

With these intentions, we set out from Dublin, on Friday, July 29. I took with me some tobacco for the cottagers, which afterwards I did not give, because I thought the use of it a mischievous and expensive habit, which it was not well to encourage. I had with me some bacon also, for the same purpose, and found that it was thankfully received by those to whom I gave it.

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At the close of the sixteenth century the New Testament was translated into Irish by Dr. Daniel (afterwards Archbishop of Tuam), and was published by him in 1603. [1] In 1608 he published the Book of Common Prayer. [2] About 1638 Bedell, Bishop of Kilmore, completed his translation of the Bible into Irish. [2] But, as he died before he could get it printed, so great was the indifference of the Protestants in general to the design, that about forty years elapsed before it was printed. [3] Only one edition of the New Testament had been published, [4] when the Irish types, which had been employed for that purpose, and which were in the hands of the King's printer, were sold to the Jesuits, and were employed by them at Douay for the dissemination of their doctrines in Ireland. [5] At length, in 1681, Robert Boyle printed, at his own cost, a second edition of the New Testament, just seventy-eight years after the publication of the first, during all which time Protestant zeal had slept. [6] After this, Mr. Boyle contributed 700*l.* to the first edition of Bedell's Bible, which was printed in 1686. [7] Then Protestant zeal went to sleep again, since the whole eighteenth century passed away before another copy of the Irish Bible was printed. [8] The Protestant clergy were equally negligent of oral instruction in a language which the Irish could understand. Bishop Bedell, indeed, instituted in Trinity College an Irish lecture, [9] and looked upon a knowledge of the Irish language as so essential to a clergyman in some parts of his diocese that he rejected several candidates for ordination simply for want of it. [10] Yet all his efforts seem to have led very few clergymen to study the language while he lived, and at his death the subject was forgotten. [11] Dr. Price, indeed, Archbishop of Cashel, who had been ordained by Bedell, maintained some clergymen to preach to the people in Irish, [12] And in 1703 the lower House of Convocation resolved " that preachers in all the dioceses of this kingdom, preaching in the Irish tongue, would be a great means of their conversion." [13] And, again, in 1710, they resolved, " That a competent number of ministers, duly qualified to instruct the natives of this kingdom, and perform the offices of religion to them *in their own language*, be provided, and encouraged by a suitable maintenance ;" [14] but from that day to this, during a period of 120 years, the church of Ireland has done nothing to accomplish this object. [14] This was not because the numbers who spoke the Irish were inconsiderable, for, to this day, it is said to be spoken by the majority of the people in Donegal, Louth, Meath, and Westmeath, and, excepting the great towns and their neighbourhood, in the whole of Munster and Connaught. It prevails in Kilkenny, and is much spoken in Tyrone, Monaghan, and Cavan, and in the mountainous districts of Antrim, Down, Armagh, and Londonderry. [15] Upon the whole, it is calculated that at least a million and a half are incapable of understanding a continued dis-

course in English. [16] And this estimate was adopted by the Commissioners on Education in 1825, who report, “ It has been estimated that the number of Irish who employ the ancient language of the country exclusively is not less than 500,000, and that at least a million more, although they have some understanding of English, and can employ it for the ordinary purposes of traffic, make use of their tongue on all other occasions as the natural vehicle of their thoughts.” [17] Mr. Anderson has, however, offered considerable evidence to shew that the language is familiarly employed by above 3,000,000 still. [18] For all this part of the Irish population English instruction has been nearly useless ; and yet for more than two centuries, since the first publication of the Irish Testament, no other instruction has been given them. This has been the more criminal, because of the passionate attachment which they bear to their native tongue. The use of it will give, says Mr. Anderson, who spoke from his own observation, to every measure for their spiritual improvement, “ an irresistible energy.” [19] To this day very few Irish clergy understand it, but those who do, concur in their opinion of its influence.

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BETWEEN Kells and Athboy the country is flat and rich, with thorn hedges, and some hedge-row trees, which make the country much resemble the flatter parts of England, except that, instead of neat cottages, with two stories, there are the usual mud hovels, and instead of the China rose and the honeysuckle, the well-tended little flower-garden, and the cottage gate, there is nothing but the stench and deformity of the dunghill at their doors. At Athboy we were hospitably entertained by the excellent clergyman, Mr. Noble. After breakfast, he kindly drove us in his phaeton to see his brother, who has a large grazing farm in the neighbourhood. It was pleasant to see again something like English farming, hedges better kept, and beautiful cattle, lying in the large enclosures. The cattle are sold to jobbers for the English market. Hay was still lying in the fields, and some fields of grass were yet uncut. But the season was said to be unusually late. On our way we visited four of Lord Darnley's schools. The first two are in the town, and are well attended. The master of the boys' school is a Protestant, and the mistress of the girls' school is likewise. The Bible is freely used, and the large majority of the children are Roman Catholics. The second two schools are about two miles from the town, amidst a population of labourers. These were also well attended. The children almost all Catholics, and the Bible freely used. Yet this is a Catholic and Irish-speaking district. If the gentlemen of Ireland would use their property and influence as the late Lord Darnley did, to multiply scriptural schools, few Catholic children would be long ignorant of the Bible. Near these schools were several cabins, into which we entered, close, hot and dark. One was without a chimney, and the smoke was blinding. But when a small hole in the roof served for a chimney, there being no draught, the smoke still circulated freely about the cabin, staining and polishing the poles and straw of the roof, so that they seemed to be varnished. These dismal abodes are to be pulled down, as the tenants feared. “ And where then,” I said, “ will you go ?” “ Troth, I do not know where,” answered the poor cottier, a sick cripple, whose children were very young. When the fall in the prices of grain increases the quantity of pasture land in Ireland, and consequently diminishes employment, the lot of the cottiers, who have been multiplying as agricultural labourers, becomes wretched in the extreme. If they remain they must starve, for there is no employment ; if they remove, they find a surplus of labourers every where, and still meet with starvation and death. No class on earth, perhaps, is to be more pitied, except it be the North American Indians, upon whose forest homes the white population, along the whole western frontier of the Canadas and the United States, is annually advancing. As the invading torrent gains upon them, it leaves them only the choice of different deaths. If they still cling to the glades and thickets they have loved from child-

hood, the saw and the plough of the white man scare away the wild animals which are their clothing, food, and wealth, so that they must starve ; or if they retire into the interior, it is to encounter hostile tribes, already jealous of intrusion, because dreading, like them, to be dispossessed, and they must perish in the conflict. Next to them in the hopelessness of their misery, are the ejected tenantry of Ireland. Before several of the Athboy cottiers, however, there was a better prospect.. Their landlord seemed to be a humane man : they were his labourers as well as tenants, and expected from him better cabins, in the place of those of which they were to be dispossessed. But many of the labourers of this neighbourhood bear upon their thin, white, worn faces, as well as in their tattered clothes, the proofs of extreme penury. It was evident they could not have enough, even of dry potatoes.

The testimony of the Rev. James Rickard, P. P., shews that the destitution must be extreme. He states, that in the Union of Athboy and Rathmore there are 900 labourers, of whom only 250 are in constant work, and the wages are only in winter 8*d.* and in summer from 10*d.* to 1*s.* The unusual extent of the mud suburb gives painful confirmation to his testimony. In some respects, however, Athboy has cheering prospects. Mr. Noble has established, and maintains at his own cost, an infant school, which is extremely popular with both parents and children. The school has 50 children, many of whom are Roman Catholics. He has also established a tract and book shop, at which many religious tracts are sold ; and he has two or three cottage lectures. In addition to these labours, he superintends a circle of Irish schools, in connexion with the Kings court district. There are in the neighbourhood near 40 Irish teachers, each of whom, to be paid, must bring 20 scholars to the Inspector's examination. One of these teachers I met, with bare feet, cutting a drain upon the edge of a bog. He had 23 scholars. Through this machinery many therefore are reading the Scriptures.

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We left Athboy early, and breakfasting at Kinnegad, came into the great road between Dublin and Ballinasloe, which latter place we reached the same evening. For some distance the country was a rich flat, With hedge-row wood, and almost all in cultivation. There was little apparent improvement in the condition of the poor. The mud cabins were in bad condition ; the windows of many were small holes, without glass ; some were without chimneys. The women and children were generally ill clothed, and the men looked worn and thin. Every where we saw the great coat, the long spade, the outside car, the dray, the light horse, oats, potatoes, and bog. Towards Athlone the country becomes more open and less fertile ; the Slieve Bloom mountains to the south and westward, some distant peaks of Clare and Galway, alone relieving the monotony of the interminable level. Athlone is said by Inglis to be rapidly improving. Eighty tons, chiefly of corn, are on an average sent down the Shannon weekly, by the Navigation Company, and eggs have been sold, on one market day, to the value of 300*l.*

Here we first saw the Shannon rolling through the arches of the old bridge, as transparent as the Rhone at Geneva, but not so blue. The peat-mosses through which its waters have drained, give them a bright amber colour. Above the bridge it is said to be 300 yards wide, and to range from 20 to 35 feet in depth. [19] Thence we crossed a stony and sterile tract to Ballinasloe.

At the entrance of the town, by the road-side, a temporary hut had been constructed over the ditch, by means of two upright stakes, with one transverse ; a rude wattling and roof of straw connected these together, and formed the hut, which had no other door or window than an aperture in front. Here we found a youth of eighteen, stretched upon the straw in the dry

ditch, in a high fever, and apparently near death. “ He was as fine a boy, a month ago,” said his weeping mother, “ as could be seen, and can speak three languages.” While thus dilating on his excellence with maternal eloquence, she suddenly exclaimed, with impassioned violence, “ Oh murder, what a screaming they make, which kills him ! Would your honour but *spake* a word to them, may be they would stop.” Indeed, the poor woman had reason to complain. The noise of which she spoke was sufficiently disturbing. About twenty boys and men were playing on the road at hurling, (or hockey,) and as the ball passed the wretched tenement, the clatter of their sticks, and the roar of their conflicting voices, were enough to harass stronger nerves than his. I spoke to them, and they moved away. “ But do they often come thus ?” “ Och, then, they come every evening, and when I spake to them, they say, ‘ Take him to hell wid you,’ and play all the more. What will I do ! what will I do !” She lived in the county of Roscommon, but the sudden illness of her son, who fell ill when returning home from Galway, had forced her to come hither with her three half-naked little children. And here this poor widow was, with her four children, destitute and friendless : and this was on the high road, and close to the town. We could only give her a few shillings, and commend her to the mercy of God.

A little nearer the town, the same evening, we met one of the most miserable objects I ever beheld. It was a chimney-sweeping boy, about ten years old, whose only clothing was a torn, short, sooty shirt, leaving his breast and legs quite bare. He was a perfect skeleton. His father being dead, his mother, who lives in another county, sold him for 1*l.* 5*s.* to the savage, who was not ashamed to let him appear in that condition before his fellow townsmen. That such a brute should be found in Galway is not remarkable ; England might furnish such ; but that such a dying youth, and such a starved child, should die unheeded, before the eyes of a whole town, is strange.

Perhaps, however, a residence in Ireland would make one familiar with such things. Close to the town of Tipperary I once saw a sick woman, laid by the road-side, in equal destitution, under a blanket stretched over two poles, fixed in the ditch. And a few years since, when walking on the shore of Clare, amidst the heaps of sea-weed there collected to make kelp, I found that one heap larger than the rest was hollowed out, and tenanted by a poor sick young woman, who had been servant at the village inn ; the only furniture in this damp mass, which the turf fire within made to smoke in every part like a dung-hill, was the blanket on which she lay. There she seemed left to die, forsaken by all the world. But she had been found out by her mother, who took a long journey to share with her that miserable lodging, and who was now there to save her life. I heard afterwards that she recovered.

The inn at Ballinasloe is clean and good, and stands on the bank of the Suck, an important tributary to the Shannon, and whose waters have the same amber transparency. Although the town has not the poverty-stricken air, which is so common in Irish towns, yet it has back streets which are filthy and wretched. In one of these we found the national school, held in a long, narrow, dark, and dirty room, with a mud floor. No school could be easily in a worse condition. The supply of books was inadequate ; there was no Bible, and the Scripture Extracts were not in use. There seemed to be no proper classification of the children, and I could not learn that there was any regular or effective superintendence. Yet here were 120 children closely packed, and some of them great boys. All were, I think, barefooted, and nearly all in tatters. Separated from this, only by the green upon which the fair is held, are two schools, main deacon Trench, Lord Clancarty’s brother, catechising the children. From thence we accompanied the Archdeacon to a cottage, which we found filled with Roman Catholics, assembled to hear him lecture. He has several other cottage lectures, and attends

several other schools in the neighbourhood on his brother's property, I was exceedingly glad to see that the neat white-washed cottages on that part of the property which was not under middle men, confirmed the statement of Inglis, that he is a considerate and liberal landlord. His extensive park, his excellent house, his good pictures, and his large establishment, do not give him half the honour which he derives from being a good landlord. Unhappily such seem, by frequent testimony, to be scarce in Ireland.

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FROM Ballinasloe we turned southwards, intending to pass through Birr and Shinrone to Limerick. Our first stage was to Banagher, across the flats on the right bank of the Shannon. It was truly Counaught. Unreclaimed bog and undrained waste land were abundant : the cabins were wretched in the extreme ; and several of the labourers whom we met were without stockings. We were crossing the parish of Aughrim, which is as miserable as it appeared. A fall in the price of grain having turned much of the corn land into pasture, has therefore lessened the demand for labourers ; and these have, in the meanwhile, multiplied. Lord Clanbrock gives *8d.* a day in summer, and *6d.* in winter, without diet. Mr. Maher gives *8d.* throughout the year, and thinks that a man with a family must almost starve with less. Mr. Wade has cottier tenants in his debt, and makes them work for him at *5d.* a day, not only in winter, but in summer also, when other labourers are getting *8d.*, threatening to execute decrees against them for rent due unless they would work at those wages. Numbers are ready to work at *6d.* a day throughout the year. Occasionally labourers go to work without a breakfast, and are obliged to leave off from faintness. From the great competition for employment, any wages are taken. Men will work for anything which will just support life ; insomuch that Mr. Birmingham, Lord Clanbrock's agent, declared " they suffer more than human nature could almost be believed to endure, and yet they do not repine." [20]

In the neighbouring parish of Dononaughta, through which our road also lay, there are 300 labourers, of whom only 100 get occasional employment ; they live on dry potatoes, and have scarcely enough of them. [21] This melancholy road, unrelieved by the sight of a gentleman's house, a plantation, a carriage, a comfortable farm-house, or any thing betokening prosperity, brought us to the Shannon at Banagher. Here a small fort on the Galway side, with a piece of cannon on its battlements, commands the bridge which we crossed. The clear stream, still deeply stained with peat, was running strongly beneath us. On the left bank the untidy and straggling town climbs up a small hill, from the top of which there is an extensive view of the noble river winding its way over the level from Athlone. The town, though of poor appearance, is improving, has a good corn market, a considerable export, and a thriving retail trade. [22] To me, however, it was more interesting on another account. It was here that I first saw the working of the Home Mission. I had, indeed, found it elsewhere : I had crossed its lines of operation at Dundalk, Newcastle, and Newry : and it visits King's-court, Kells, Athboy, Kilbeggan, Athlone, and Ballinasloe. But here I saw it at work, attended the service, and spoke with several of those accustomed to attend it. On inquiry, I learned that when the mission first came there a few years ago, it was thought to be the experiment of a few enthusiastic young men, who were termed, in contempt, the new lights. Curiosity then brought about fifteen persons to listen; and since that time opinions have greatly changed. Sixty clergymen, some of them among the most able and influential men in the church of Ireland, have successively preached there ; and though there has been some dislike to the mission manifested, of which it may serve as a specimen, that the parish clerk recently said, when asked to attend, that he would as soon go to hear a Priest, yet, through the blessing of God, it has prospered.

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Six miles more brought us to the town of Birr, one of the neatest towns I have seen in Ireland. There is a splendid Roman Catholic chapel, a fine church, and opposite it a handsome Gothic gate, leading into the grounds of Lord Ross. We had been anxious to visit this place, that we might make the acquaintance of the Messrs. Crotty, two Catholic priests, who, without formally joining any Protestant Church, are now preaching the Gospel to their former Roman Catholic congregation. Mr. Michael Crotty, the elder of the two cousins, when a student at Maynooth, appears to have been very free in his animadversions on the system of the college and its conductors. Being consequently unable to obtain college testimonials for ordination, he went abroad to complete his education for the priesthood. On his return, in 1820, he was made curate of Birr, in which situation he continued till, a vacancy then occurring, he was chosen parish priest by one party of the parishioners. Meanwhile Mr. Kennedy was named by another party, and the latter choice was confirmed by the Roman Catholic bishop. Endeavouring, in spite of this decision of his bishop, to get possession of the splendid new chapel at Birr, which had been partly built by his adherents, Mr. Crotty found himself excluded by Policemen, with fixed bayonets. Since that time he has been preaching in a temporary chapel to a considerable congregation, chiefly of poor persons.

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We had now left Connaught, and were again in Leinster, following the line of the southwestern boundary of King's County. From Birr our course lay through the Barony of Clonlisk to Shinrone. We saw no symptoms of improvement in the state of the people, no inhabitants being visible but the worn and ragged tenants of filthy cabins. In this neighbourhood, no less than others, there is a frightful excess of labourers . . . it appears that of 1599 labourers in the barony there are 668, or two-fifths of the whole, who have not regular employment. It is easy, at once, to perceive the consequences of this state of things. It must depress wages and raise the rents of small holdings of land till nothing is left to the tenant and the labourer but potatoes and rags. In fact, wages are 8*d.* for one half of the year, and 7*d.* the other half. A labourer in constant employment works about 350 days, and earns 7*l.* 8*s.*, but pays from 4*l.* to 5*l.* for his cabin and potatoe ground. The others can only get employment for a few weeks of the year. It makes their case the more deplorable, that among them are many dispossessed tenants once in a better condition. It was to be expected that in such circumstances many of them should be easily excited to acts of violence. Strange labourers have often, within the last seven years, been assaulted and driven away from the barony, and some Connaught men, working in a bog, had their barrows broken during the night, to prevent them continuing the work. But those who have been taken up for such disturbances, have been generally, as the Commissioners report, idlers ; for “ *the employed labourer reprobates all disturbances, whether political or agrarian.*” A few miles further we found a kind and hospitable welcome at Cangort Park, belonging to Mr. Trench, with whose son, the Rev. Frederick Trench, I had been previously acquainted.

The views from this place of the Slieve Bloom Mountains to the south-east, the Keeper, towering over Nenagh, some nearer hills rising above the trees of the park, are very pleasing. Hay-making was not yet over (Aug. 11 :) women were working at 4*d.* a day, men at 8*d.* and 10*d.* Near the park gate we found a neat girls' school, belonging to Mrs. Trench. After inspecting this we visited a national school in the neighbourhood. The master is a Protestant, and the Scripture Extracts of the Board are in daily use ; but the children appeared to be very ill-taught, unaccustomed to be questioned on any lesson which they read, and destitute of the

usual Irish vivacity. After this I visited the London Hibernian School at Bahamore, between Cangort and Cloughjordan. There I found the Society's spelling-books and the Testament in use, but no other books, no maps, and the children's minds apparently very little exercised on what they read. . . .if I did not much admire Mr. Trench's Hibernian School, there were other things in the parish which I witnessed with much delight. Near the school I entered with him into a cottage as tidy and clean as a cabin with a mud floor could be, in which a lecture is held by the curate every Wednesday, when the cottage is filled with Protestants. I asked the owner of the house, herself a pious person, whether any of the Romans now attended. "They are afraid," she answered, "for if any one should attend, the Priest would probably make him stand in the chapel in a sheet, before all the people, or place him at the altar with a candle in his mouth." "Still they are on good terms with you." "Oh, the Romans are quiet and peaceable enough ; they only break each other's heads now." "Do you call that being peaceable and quiet ?" "Sure, they don't break our beads, and that's being quiet enough."

"But do they really fight with each other ?"

"Wait till to-morrow, at the fair, and if it is like the last, you'll see fighting and beating enough."

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Drive to Castle Connell—Rapids of the Shannon—Sacred Well—Approach to Limerick—Shannon below the City—Commerce of Limerick—Its Pauperism—Chapel of the Blind Asylum—Roman Catholic Chapels—Ceremony of the Mass—State of the Poor in the County of Clare—Scenery above Cratloe—Boat Race on the Shannon—Peasantry of Cratloe.

LEAVING Cangort, (August 12,) we passed through Nenagh and Limerick to Cratloe, a village in the county of Clare. Our road lay through Cloughjordan, which we found thronged with persons who had come to the monthly fair. Horses, cows, sheep, and pigs, had been brought in for sale. The stalls were scantily supplied with apples, gingerbread, tin-ware, wooden vessels, bread, potatoes, &c., and all seemed busy with their negotiations. The women were in cotton gowns, and most of them wore caps. Of the men, some looked intelligent and lively; some were large and well formed ; others looked worn and thin, and many had a more coarse and degraded look than I had observed in any other town through which we passed : numbers were still coming into the town along the Limerick road, some of whom were conducting their pig to market, with a whisp of straw tied to the hind leg ; others carried nothing but the shillelah.

Throughout the road we observed the usual crops of potatoes and corn, interspersed with bog, ill-drained grass lands, and occasionally a patch of flax. Nothing relieved the dull uniformity of the flat, but the same hilly horizon which was visible from Cangort. After Nenagh, a poor looking place, with a miserable suburb, the neighbourhood of the Keeper Mountain on the left, made the scenery less tame. But still everywhere we saw a bare region, neglected fences, slovenly cultivation, decayed hovels, and half naked men and women. It was a relief to come at length upon Castle Connell and the Shannon. And we were soon floating in a slight boat upon its surface. Should we ascend to Lough Derg, or descend to see the rapids ? Either trip the boatman assured us would abundantly repay our labour, and I was quite of his mind. Not to visit Killaloe and see where the Shannon spreads out into a lake of 23 miles in length, studded with islands and sheltered by woody banks and distant hills, was no small



sacrifice. But this would have taken time, and it would have been worse to lose the rapids : so we gave the order to descend. Swiftly we glided on the amber-coloured and brilliant river, which flashed and foamed along its course, till having shot the first rapid, and come into calmer water, we landed on the opposite bank, about a mile below the village. From this spot we walked for about a mile upon the well-wooded margin of the river, sometimes looking down on its foam, sometimes pleased with its more tranquil flow. The scene is not romantic, it has no gigantic vegetation, it cannot be compared with Rostrevor or Killarney, but in that bright day, after the naked country which we had traversed, it was indeed delightful. The earth was all one emerald ; the luxuriant grounds of Lord Massey on the left bank, lighted up by the cloudless sun, looked smilingly upon those of Sir Hugh Massey on the right ; and between them the broad bright transparent river was dashing and sparkling over its rocky bed. Northwards it was rolling to our feet, southwards, it was hurrying far away to the ocean, glittering and dancing in the sun-beams. And whether the eye explored the stream upwards, or traced its descent till it was lost behind the projecting headland, still there was nothing to be seen, but lawn, and wood, those gentle slopes, and that exulting river, except where far off the blue and hazy mountains seemed to look in tranquil majesty upon the peaceful scene. But in Ireland there is an omnipresent mischief—and when you would let your thoughts repose among the sweet influences of nature, and would hush your heart into a tranquillity like that of the unruffled lake, or the sleeping foliage on a breath-less summer’s evening, then Popery looks in upon you like a spectre, or, if it be half concealed, like a snake among the flowers “ there comes a token like a scorpion’s sting,” warning you of its hateful presence. I felt it at Killarney, I felt it at Rostrevor, and here it was again. In the heart of Sir Hugh’s grounds there is a sacred well, reputed to be of power to cure various disorders and infirmities. Thither the crippled and the sorrowful resort. The trees are blackened with their consecrated candles, the circuit of the well is beaten by their naked knees, the water is turbid with their frequent ablutions, the bushes are disfigured with their votive rags, and multitudes of little wooden bowls, there consecrated to St. Shenan (or Shannon,) testify their superstitious hope that the saint will be pleased with their devotions, and will, heal their griefs. Oh that these poor suffering devotees may soon turn from imaginary mediators and saviours to Him who is indeed able and willing *to save to the uttermost, all that come unto God through Him.* [23]

On our return to the village, the importunities of some miserable objects again interrupted our enjoyment of the gentle scenery. How can you be pleased with the tranquillity of inanimate nature, when it seems only to insult the rags and wretchedness of the starving creatures who creep amidst its shades ? Unhappily too, this poverty, which obtruded itself upon our view, was only the overflowing of an extended penury in the whole neighbourhood. Of the numerous cottiers in Stradbally, Kilnagariff, and Castleconnell, few have constant employment ; their wages, when they get work, are 10*d.* in summer, and 8*d.* in winter ; their diet is potatoes and sour milk, with a few salt herrings in Lent. “ They have scarcely any clothes to wear ;” “ they are all half naked, except those few who get permanent employment.” [24] But nature was still fair. After skirting for some distance the woods of Lord Clare, we again entered the main road, which we had left to visit the Rapids, just as the sun was about to touch the Galway hills, and threw a misty splendour over the broad river, and the woody plain through which it flows. When we entered Limerick the bright evening was verging upon twilight, and without halting we crossed the river, and penetrated Clare, as far as the village of Cratloe, which is about five miles from Limerick and upon the river’s edge.

In the morning a six-oared boat belonging to Mr. Augustas O’Brien conveyed us to Limerick. For the honour of the Shannon no time could have been more unfortunate. It was low water ; a thick haze almost hid the wooded hills of Clare, which rise about two miles

from the bank ; there was a burning sun and breathless atmosphere, we were on a blazing plain of muddy water, and on each side of us was a steaming continent of mud, on which the crane and the curlew alone shewed signs of life. Our good natured and communicative boatmen pulled well against the stream, and soon brought us within sight of the warehouses and the beautiful new bridge of the city. After ordering a car to convey us back to Cratloe, we proceeded to visit some parts of the city. For its general state and prospects I must refer my reader to Inglis, whose instructive tour should be read by every one.

But notwithstanding this general prosperity, of which the shops and warehouses, alone afford indications even to the passing stranger, painful symptoms of a wide-spread pauperism, immediately obtrude themselves on his notice. Women in tatters were begging in every street ; unemployed labourers were standing in little groups, or sitting in the great thoroughfares, or sauntering along, with nothing to do, as one of them said to a Commissioner, but to drag misery at their heels. It was our chief wish to see the state of these poor creatures, and therefore crossing the bridge, we penetrated the old city. In one of the first streets that we entered, large stands were piled with pig meat, *i. e.* salted heads, tails, and offal of pig, so dirty, stale, and apparently decayed, as to be perfectly revolting. This odious condiment was selling at  $3\frac{1}{2}d.$  per pound. Further on, in a thronged and principal street, the Monmouth Street of Limerick, not only were there plenty of old clothes shops, but the old clothes were interspersed with rags and tatters, which were also on sale for those whose means would only allow them to patch with other rags, the rags which they already wore. Here a huge drunken woman, holding up an infant almost naked, and brandishing it with one arm just as if it was a stone she was going to fling at the bead of an enemy, exclaimed, " Here is the son of a man." Poor little being ; what a mother ! what a neighbourhood ! what a prospect ! From some of the adjoining alleys I positively shrunk, they seemed too horrible to enter. One, however, we visited. After seeing several bare abodes, we entered one in which was a poor old soldier, who had served with Nelson and lost his leg at Algiers. He is in the receipt of a pension, upon which he depends. But with a wife and four children to maintain, he was poor enough. His four children, the eldest of whom seemed about thirteen years old, slept on the rude bedstead, the parents had a small bundle of straw on the mud floor. Near this was a door, before which was a sort of causeway of heather across the stagnant filth in front of the house. As we entered, the light from a small aperture without glass, which served for a window, was thrown upon a pile of heather, occupying the left of the room and reaching to the ceiling. The right was involved in darkness. In front was the window, beneath which a man and woman were sitting before their turf embers, on the rude bedstead, which seemed the only piece of furniture in the house. The floor was as wet and dirty as the stall of a stable belonging to the second rate inn of a county town towards the close of a market day. To approach the owners of this lodging we were obliged to step over the manure which lay upon the floor. By the partial light I observed that both were ragged, and the man had the haggard look of starvation. While standing near the bedstead, my shoulder was suddenly saluted by the nibble of a horse. Turning round, I now for the first time perceived that one third of the apartment belonged to the animal. It was plump and sleek to the touch. I now found that the man was a broom seller. He sold his brooms at a halfpenny, and the profits would scarcely supply him with potatoes. But how then, I asked, do you contrive to keep your horse so well. " Ogh then, I might even beg potatoes round the town if it was not for her, and sure I had rather starve myself, than not give her enough." And what then do yon give her ? " Potatoe skins, heath tops, and occasionally bits of hay." The care of the master seemed repaid by the affection of the horse. The pretty creature, now more clearly visible as our eyes became accustomed to the gloom, put her head on his shoulder, with her lips played with his ear, nibbled at the collar of his shirt, and to judge by its bright eye and the sleekness of its coat, seemed to enjoy its lot. Its

master too, amidst hunger and want, had a gentle cheerfulness which was most touch-ing. The gift of a single shilling brought a flood of benedictions. Traversing an old corridor to another apartment, we found in the open air a small heap of straw, which had been for some weeks, the only bed and lodging of a woman and her two children. At another door, the aspect of a half naked and trembling old woman invited us to enter. Upon our asking her which was her room, she led the way up a dark and decayed staircase to her miserable den. It was not empty, but instead of furniture, it held what seemed to be the accumulated rags and dirt of half a century. As soon as we were entered, she lay herself down as though she had been alone, upon a ragged old cloth, spread upon the floor, and groaned out, " They are all gone, they are all gone." Her sons were dead : Her old husband was past work ;—and she was ill. " What will I do, (she added,) what will I do ? God is good but when next winter comes, what will I do ?" When a shilling was given her, she threw herself on her knees, and with her eyes closed, begun to mutter her ejaculatory prayers ; then, still kneeling, began to pour out her expressions of gratitude with a rapid and impassioned utterance, all the while vehemently striking her bare and withered chest. We were then retiring to the door. " Och no," she then cried out, " I have not said enough yet," and rising up she rushed to the door, and then again falling on her knees, spread her two withered arms to heaven and still con-tinued to invoke blessings on us till we disappeared.

Every cellar in these alleys seemed to be occupied. One with damp mud floor, no window, no chimney, but a trap door which served for window, chimney, and door, was the abode of two families.

The filth outside the doors is indescribable and the atmosphere pestiferous. Some poor and dirty districts may be looked for, in all great cities, but in Limerick, these are not only more squalid and filthy than usual, but also more extended.

On Sunday, August 14, I attended service at the Blind Asylum, which has excellent Ministers. As at the Penitentiary at Dublin, and the church at Cloughjordan, there was here no clerk : and in all these places the absence of that functionary was a decided improvement. Clerks seldom read with feeling, and when they do not, their loud, monotonous, and unintelligent recitative destroys the devotional tone of the whole service. There, instead of that unpleasant chime of the hired performer, I heard the serious responses of many devout worshippers, and it seemed real prayer. The singing was almost confined to a gentle choir of blind girls. It was pretty, but the congregation seemed to forget that *they* were to praise God. At Cloughjordan, numbers seemed to join in the loud melody, with all their heart and soul : and the Penitentiary in Dublin had the sweetest congregational singing I have ever heard. There was no instrumental music, nor any parade of fine performance ; but rich voices scattered over the whole building, in sweetest harmony, gave full effect to a melodious air, and uttered with apparent devotion the language of gratitude and praise.

The next morning, between half-past eight and nine o'clock, I visited three of the Roman Catholic Chapels. At the Dominican Chapel the service was not begun, but hundreds were kneeling at their separate devotions. It is a handsome structure, fantastically ornamented in the interior. At the door was the holy water, then the confession boxes, then there was a space for the poorer congregation, and then, railed off and supplied with benches, a space in front of the altar occupied by the richer members of the flock. On each side the altar was drapery sparkling with tinsel ; not far from the altar was a pulpit. In the Augustinian and Franciscan chapels, the mass was begun, and in both, the numbers coming in were so great that I could stand near the door, and observe the order of the service without wounding the feelings of any

of the worshippers, though I did not cross, and bow, and kneel, as they did. In the Franciscan Chapel I was so hemmed in by the poor people, that when I wished to come out, I was obliged to step over a poor old woman beside me, who had prostrated herself with her face on the ground in prayer. I never see a Roman Catholic congregation without the deepest interest and pity. They seem so much in earnest, so humble, and so devout. As they kneel on the bare ground, one lifts up his eye to heaven ; another wipes away the tear that has rolled down his cheek ; a third, with clasped hands, looks earnestly at the crucifix ; and a fourth is devoutly reading his book of prayers. Superstitious as they are, I always hope that God may have his children among them. But then what is there to guide and elevate their devotional feeling ? After each one has sprinkled himself with holy water at the door, *ad abigendos dæmones*, crossed himself, and knelt on one knee, he sees before him the altar, the *pix*, the crucifix, the chalice, the *paten*, and the two lighted candles. Then comes in the priest with his *amice*, *cincture*, *maniple*, *stole*, and *chasuble*, makes a sign of the cross, kneels on one knee, goes up to the altar, retires from it, bows to it, goes up again, and kisses it. This done, he walks to the epistle side of the altar, and, after another crossing, reads the *introit*.

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On my return to Cratloe, it being a Roman Catholic holiday, the hay-fields, I observed, were deserted of their labourers. There was a sabbatic cessation from work, and the people, in their best frieze coats, were sauntering along the road. From Cratloe we took a drive along the Ennis road, visiting some of the cottages on our way. The cabins of the small farmers were just a little better than those of the labourers, which were of the poorest description. Several were without chimney or window. In one was a poor old woman, maintained by “ her little girl.” In another, less wretched, the old woman (old me that “ her little boy” worked for her. The little girl, I found, upon enquiry, to be a woman forty years of age, and the little boy, if he resembled his brother, who stood near while the old woman was speaking, must be an athletic man, above six feet high, in the middle of life. This filial kindness is, I believe, common among the Irish peasantry. The description of one of the cabins may serve to illustrate the state of many. It was of the rudest construction. Stones heaped together without cement, formed the outer wall : within was a wall of mud, and the roof was a thin covering of straw, laid upon some poles cut from the neighbouring wood. For this the owner paid his landlord, who is a middleman of the neighbourhood, *10s. 6d.* as a ground-rent. His first resource for food was one quarter of an acre, for which he paid to the same landlord *1l.* These rents be worked out at the rate of *8d.* a day, with food in the summer. For occasional jobs he got *10d.* in summer, and *6d.* in winter, but could very rarely get work. Since the beginning of the year he had only got eight weeks work, and for three weeks had been without any thing to do. With these resources he had to maintain a wife and four children. It need scarcely be added, that he could only procure for them dry potatoes, comforts being out of the question. He had no pig, because he had not been able to raise the money to buy one. A little worn out straw formed their bed : there was a sheet, but no blanket, and the only bed-clothes were the only clothes in their possession, the rags which they wore. The children looked half fed, and the parents were worn and thin ; but they seemed resigned and amiable. Other cottiers were in similar circumstances. In this immediate neighbourhood there are not, as I was told, many middlemen : but the country has still many, and the number between the owner of the soil and the cultivator is sometimes frightful. I heard of one property in which the head landlord, the Archbishop of Cashel, received *1l.* per acre: six middlemen, one under the other, received each *1l.*, and the wretched cultivator must pay the whole *7l.* out of the sweat of his brow ! How could he be such a fool, it may be said, as to take the land at that rate ? What could he

do ? He had no means of emigrating—he could get no work—he must have land or starve—and there was no other land to be had.

Not many of the poor of that immediate neighbourhood emigrate either to England, or to the United States. The first class have fared ill, and came home to tell the story of their hardships, and there is no money to swell the numbers of the second. But bad as is the condition of the Barony of Bunratty, the interior of Clare seems to be still poorer, if we may take the Barony of Corcomroe, which was examined into by the Commissioners, as a specimen.

The number . . . in that barony alone, who are either unemployed, or partially employed, is 1565 ; there are many dispossessed tenants, and the wages of labour are of course low ; 8*d.* in summer without food, and 6*d.* in winter. Occasionally there are instances of great suffering. One man near Ennistymon got employment, but his family were so distressed, that he could not afford to buy himself victuals. When his fellow workmen went to their meals, he used to hide himself to conceal from them that he had nothing to eat. Two other men, being too poor to buy fuel, boiled all their potatoes for the Week on Sunday, and through the week ate them cold with a little salt. [25] What a contrast nature seemed to present to all this misery ! On our way back to Cratloe, we entered an extensive wood belonging to Mr. O'Brien, which climbs a hill of considerable elevation, and through the picturesque stems of the birch-trees saw before us, the brimful, bright, and magnificent Shannon, spreading far away to the ocean— across it the Keeper Mountain, the beautiful Galtee Chain, and farther to the west the hills of Limerick—while nearer, the ruins of Carrick-go-gugnyel Castle, on the southern bank of the river, and of Bunratty Castle, on the northern bank, adorned the sunlit foliage of the woods by which they are surrounded. That afternoon there was to be a race between two six-oared boats belonging to Mr. O'Brien, which took us down to the brink of the river, that we might see the people in their best trim. The holiday forbade them to work, but allowed amusement. Accordingly above one hundred persons were collected at the starting place ; most of them well clothed in good homemade frieze. The news of the affair had spread. A fiddler and a bagpipe-man had been attracted by the hope of gain, and each of the rival musicians was playing to two pair of rustic dancers, who accomplished the Irish jig, (the most ungraceful of all movements,) with energetic vivacity. The people seemed happy and amiable. Mr. Inglis mentions a certain baronet who made it his rule to restrict his intercourse with his tenantry to the narrowest limits possible ; more wisely and more humanely Mr. O'Brien lives much among them. With such intercourse, injustice on the one hand, and heart-burnings on the other, are impossible : both parties must become attached to each other, and both be improved.

[1] Anderson's Historical Sketches of the Native Irish, second edition, p. 53.

[2] And. p. 62, 63.

[3] And. 71.

[4] And. 72. [5] And. 71. [6] And. 78.

[7] And. 80. [8] And. 99. [9] And. 140.

[10] And. 141. [11] And. 143. [12] And. 150.

[13] And. 156. [14] And. 157.

[15] And. 212—14. [16] And. 215.

[17] First Report of the Commissioners, p. 82.

[18] And. 218—223.

[19] Inglis, Vol. i. p. 337.

[20] Ap. D. 1—3

[21] Sup. p. 10. [22] Inglis, i. 332.

[23] Heb. vii.25.

[24] Sup. p. 221.

[25] Ap. D. pp. 49, 50.

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