

Place & The People

In Wicklow, West Kerry and Connemara

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At A Wicklow Fair

A YEAR or two ago I wished to visit a fair in County Wicklow, and as the buying and selling in these fairs are got through very early in the morning I started soon after dawn to walk the ten or twelve miles that led to Aughrim, where the fair was to be held. When I came out into the air the cold was intense, though it was a morning of August, and the dew was so heavy that bushes and meadows of mountain grass seemed to have lost their greenness in silvery grey. In the glens I went through white mists were twisting and feathering themselves into extraordinary shapes, and showing blue hills behind them that looked singularly desolate and far away. At every turn I came on multitudes of rabbits feeding on the roadside, or on even shyer creatures—corncrakes, squirrels and snipe—close to villages where no one was awake.

Then the sun rose, and I could see lines of smoke beginning to go up from farm-houses under the hills, and sometimes a sleepy, half-dressed girl looked out of the door of a cottage when my feet echoed on the road. About six miles from Aughrim I began to fall in with droves of bullocks and sheep, in charge of two or three dogs and a herd, or with whole families of mountain people, driving nothing but a single donkey or kid. These people seemed to feel already the animation of the fair, and were talking eagerly and gaily among themselves. I did not hurry, and it was about nine o'clock when I made my way into the village, which was now thronged with cattle and sheep. On every side the usual half-humorous bargaining could be heard above the noise of the pigs and donkeys and lambs. One man would say : ' Are you going to not divide a shilling with me ? Are you going to not do it ? You're the biggest schemer ever walked down into Aughrim.'

A little further on a man said to a seller : ' You're asking too much for them lambs.' The seller answered : ' If I didn't ask it how would I ever get it ? The lambs is good lambs, and if you buy them now you'll get home nice and easy in time to have your dinner in comfort, and if you don't buy them you'll be here the whole day sweating in the heat and dust, and maybe not please yourself in the end of all.'

Then they began looking at the lambs again, talking of the cleanness of their skin and the quality of the wool, and making many extravagant remarks in their praise or against them. As I turned away I heard the loud clap of one hand into another, which always marks the conclusion of a bargain.

A little further on I found a farmer I knew standing before a public-house, looking radiant with delight. ' It's a fine fair, Mister,' he said, ' and I'm after selling the lambs I had here a month ago and no one would look at them. Then I took them to Rathdrum and Wicklow, getting up at three in the morning, and driving them in the creel, and it all for nothing. But I'm shut of them now, and it's not too bad a price I've got either. I'm after driving the lambs outside the customs (the boundary where the fair tolls are paid), and I'm waiting now for my money.' While we were talking, a cry of warning was raised : ' Mind yourselves below ; there's a drift of sheep coming down the road.' Then a couple of men and dogs appeared, trying to drive a score of sheep that some one had purchased, out of the village, between the

countless flocks that were standing already on either side of the way. This task is peculiarly difficult. Boys and men collect round the flock that is to be driven out, and try to force the animals down the narrow passage that is left in the middle of the road. It hardly ever happens, however, that they get through without carrying off a few of some one else's sheep, or losing some of their own, which have to be restored, or looked for afterwards.

The flock was driven by as well as could be managed, and a moment later an old man came up to us, and asked if we had seen a ewe passing from the west. 'A sheep is after passing,' said the farmer I was talking to, 'but it was not one of yours, for it was too wilful; it was a mountain sheep.' Sometimes animals are astray in this way for a considerable time—it is not unusual to meet a man the day after a fair wandering through the country, asking after a lost heifer, or ewe—but they are always well marked and are found in the end.

When I reached the green above the village I found the curious throng one always meets in these fairs, made up of wild mountain squatters, gentlemen farmers, jobbers and herds. At one corner of the green there was the usual camp of tinkers, where a swarm of children had been left to play among the carts while the men and women wandered through the fair selling cans or donkeys. Many odd types of tramps and beggars had come together also, and were loitering about in the hope of getting some chance job, or of finding some one who would stand them a drink. Once or twice a stir was made by some unruly ram or bull, but in these smaller fairs there seldom is much real excitement till the evening, when the bad whisky that is too freely drunk begins to be felt.

When I had spoken to one or two men that I wished to see, I sat down near a bridge at the end of the green, between a tinker who was mending a can and a herd who was minding some sheep that had not been sold. The herd spoke to me with some pride of his skill in dipping sheep to keep them from the fly, and other matters connected with his work. 'Let you not be talking,' said the tinker, when he paused for a moment. 'You've been after sheep since you were that height' (holding his hand a little over the ground), 'and yet you're nowhere in the world beside the herds that do be reared beyond on the mountains. Those men are a wonder, for I'm told they can tell a lamb from their own ewes before it is marked; and that when they have five hundred sheep on the hills—five hundred is a big number—they don't need to count them or reckon them at all, but they just walk here and there where they are, and if one is gone away they'll miss it from the rest.'

Then a woman came up and spoke to the tinker, and they went down the road together into the village. 'That man is a great villain,' said the herd, when he was out of hearing. 'One time he and his woman went up to a priest in the hills and asked him would he wed them for half a sovereign, I think it was. The priest said it was a poor price, but he'd wed them surely if they'd make him a tin can along with it. "I will, faith," said the tinker, "and I'll come back when it's done." They went off then, and in three weeks they came back, and they asked the priest a second time would he wed them. "Have you the tin can?" said the priest. "We have not," said the tinker; "we had it made at the fall of night, but the ass gave it a kick this morning the way it isn't fit for you at all." "Go on now," says the priest. "It's a pair of rogues and schemers you are, and I won't wed you at all." They went off then, and they were never married to this day.'

As I went up again through the village a great sale of old clothing was going on from booths at each side of the road, and further on boots were set out for sale on boards laid across the tops of barrels, a very usual counter. In another place old women were selling quantities of damaged fruit, kippered herrings, and an extraordinary collection of old ropes

and iron. In front of a public-house a ballad-singer was singing a song in the middle of a crowd of people. As far as I could hear it, the words ran like this :—

As we came down from Wicklow
With our bundle of switches ;
As we came down from Wicklow,
Oh ! what did we see ?
As we came to the city
We saw maidens pretty,
And we called out to ask them to buy our heath-
broom.
Heath-broom, freestone, black turf, gather them
up.
Oh ! gradh machree, Mavourneen,
Won't you buy our heath-broom ?

When the season is over
Won't we be in clover,
With the gold in our pockets
We got from heath-broom.
It's home we will toddle,
And we'll get a naggin,
And we'll drink to the maidens that bought our
heath-broom.
Heath-broom, freestone, black turf, gather them
up.
Oh ! gradh machree, Mavourneen,
Won't you buy our heath-broom ?

Before he had finished a tinker arrived, too drunk to stand or walk, but leading a tall horse with his left hand, and inviting anyone who would deny that he was the best horseman in Wicklow to fight with him on the spot. Soon afterwards I started on my way home, driving most of the way with a farmer from the same neighbourhood.

The Vagrants of Wicklow

SOME features of County Wicklow, such as the position of the principal workhouses and holiday places on either side of the coach road from Arklow to Bray, have made this district a favourite with the vagrants of Ireland. A few of these people have been on the roads for generations ; but fairly often they seem to have merely drifted out from the ordinary people of the villages, and do not differ greatly from the class they come from. Their abundance has often been regretted ; yet in one sense it is an interesting sign, for wherever the labourer of a country has preserved his vitality, and begets an occasional temperament of distinction, a certain number of vagrants are to be looked for. In the middle classes the gifted son of a family is always the poorest—usually a writer or artist with no sense for speculation—and in a family of peasants, where the average comfort is just over penury, the gifted son sinks also, and is soon a tramp on the roadside.

In this life, however, there are many privileges. The tramp in Ireland is little troubled by the laws, and lives in out-of-door conditions that keep him in good-humour and fine bodily health. This is so apparent, in Wicklow at least, that these men rarely seek for charity on any plea of ill-health, but ask simply, when they beg : ‘ Would you help a poor fellow along the

road ?' or, ' Would you give me the price of a night's lodging, for I'm after walking a great way since the sun rose ?'

The healthiness of this life, again, often causes people to live to a great age, though it is not always easy to test the stories that are told of their longevity. One man, however, who died not long ago, claimed to have reached one hundred and two with a show of likelihood ; for several old people remember his first appearance in a certain district as a man of middle age, about the year of the Famine, in 1847 or 1848. This man could hardly be classed with ordinary tramps, for he was married several times in different parts of the world, and reared children of whom he seemed to have forgotten, in his old age, even the names and sex. In his early life he spent thirty years at sea, where he sailed with some one he spoke of afterwards as ' Il mio capitane,' visiting India and Japan, and gaining odd words and intonations that gave colour to his language. When he was too old to wander in the world, he learned all the paths of Wicklow, and till the end of his life he could go the thirty miles from Dublin to the Seven Churches without, as he said, ' putting out his foot on a white road, or seeing any Christian but the hares and moon.' When he was over ninety he married an old woman of eighty-five. Before many days, however, they quarrelled so fiercely that he beat her with his stick, and came out again on the roads. In a few hours he was arrested at her complaint, and sentenced to a month in Kilmainham. He cared nothing for the plank-bed and uncomfortable diet ; but he always gathered himself together, and cursed with extraordinary rage, as he told how they had cut off the white hair which had grown down upon his shoulders. All his pride and his half-conscious feeling for the dignity of his age seemed to have set themselves on this long hair, which marked him out from the other people of his district ; and I have often heard him saying to himself, as he sat beside me under a ditch : ' What use is an old man without his hair ? A man has only his bloom like the trees ; and what use is an old man without his white hair ?'

Among the country people of the east of Ireland the tramps and tinkers who wander round from the west have a curious reputation for witchery and unnatural powers.

' There's great witchery in that country,' a man said to me once, on the side of a mountain to the east of Aughavanna, in Wicklow. ' There's great witchery in that country, and great knowledge of the fairies. I've had men lodging with me out of the west—men who would be walking the world looking for a bit of money—and every one of them would be talking of the wonders below in Connemara. I remember one time, a while after I was married, there was a tinker down there in the glen, and two women along with him. I brought him into my cottage to do a bit of a job, and my first child was there lying in the bed, and he covered up to his chin with the bed-clothes. When the tallest of the women came in, she looked around at him, and then she says :

' " That's a fine boy, God bless him."

' " How do you know it's a boy," says my woman, " when it's only the head of him you see?"

' " I know rightly," says the tinker, " and it's the first too."

' Then my wife was going to slate me for bringing in people to bewitch the child, and I had to turn the lot of them out to finish the job in the lane.'

I asked him where most of the tinkers came from that are met with in Wicklow.

' They come from every part,' he said. ' They're gallous lads for walking round through

the world. One time I seen fifty of them above on the road to Rathdangan, and they all match-making and marrying themselves for the year that was to come. One man would take such a woman, and say he was going such roads and places, stopping at this fair and another fair, till he'd meet them again at such a place, when the spring was coming on. Another, maybe, would swap the woman he had with one from another man, with as much talk as if you'd be selling a cow. It's two hours I was there watching them from the bog underneath, where I was cutting turf, and the like of the crying and kissing, and the singing and the shouting began when they went off this way and that way, you never heard in your life. Sometimes when a party would be gone a bit down over the hill, a girl would begin crying out and wanting to go back to her ma. Then the man would say : " Black hell to your soul, you've come with me now, and you'll go the whole way." I often seen tinkers before and since, but I never seen such a power of them as were in it that day.'

It need hardly be said that in all tramp life plaintive and tragic elements are common, even on the surface. Some are peculiar to Wicklow. In these hills the summer passes in a few weeks from a late spring, full of odour and colour, to an autumn that is premature and filled with the desolate splendour of decay ; and it often happens that, in moments when one is most aware of this ceaseless fading of beauty, some incident of tramp life gives a local human intensity to the shadow of one's own mood.

One evening, on the high ground near the Avonbeg, I met a young tramp just as an extraordinary sunset had begun to fade, and a low white mist was rising from the bogs. He had a sort of table in his hands that he seemed to have made himself out of twisted rushes and a few branches of osier. His clothes were more than usually ragged, and I could see by his face that he was suffering from some terrible disease. When he was quite close, he held out the table.

' Would you give me a few pence for that thing ?' he said. ' I'm after working at it all day by the river, and for the love of God give me something now, the way I can get a drink and lodging for the night.'

I felt in my pockets, and could find nothing but a shilling piece.

' I wouldn't wish to give you so much,' I said, holding it out to him, ' but it is all I have, and I don't like to give you nothing at all, and the darkness coming on. Keep the table ; it's no use to me, and you'll maybe sell it for something in the morning.'

The shilling was more than he expected, and his eyes flamed with joy.

' May the Almighty God preserve you and watch over you and reward you for this night,' he said, ' but you'll take the table ; I wouldn't keep it at all, and you after stretching out your hand with a shilling to me, and the darkness coming on.'

He forced it into my hands so eagerly that I could not refuse it, and set off down the road with tottering steps. When he had gone a few yards, I called after him : ' There's your table ; take it and God speed you.'

Then I put down his table on the ground, and set off as quickly as I was able. In a moment he came up with me, holding the table in his hands, and slipped round in front of me so that I could not get away.

' You wouldn't refuse it,' he said, ' and I after working at it all day below by the river.'

He was shaking with excitement and the exertion of overtaking me ; so I took his table and let him go on his way. A quarter of a mile further on I threw it over the ditch in a desolate place, where no one was likely to find it.

In addition to the more genuine vagrants a number of wandering men and women are to be met with in the northern parts of the county, who walk out for ferns and flowers in bands of from four or five to a dozen. They usually set out in the evening, and sleep in some ditch or shed, coming home the next night with what they have gathered. If their sales are successful, both men and women drink heavily ; so that they are always on the edge of starvation, and are miserably dressed, the women sometimes wearing nothing but an old petticoat and shawl—a scantiness of clothing that is sometimes met with also among the road-women of Kerry.

These people are nearly always at war with the police, and are often harshly treated. Once after a holiday, as I was walking home through a village on the border of Wicklow, I came upon several policemen, with a crowd round them, trying to force a drunken flower-woman out of the village. She did not wish to go, and threw herself down, raging and kicking on the ground. They let her lie there for a few moments, and then she propped herself up against the wall, scolding and storming at every one, till she became so outrageous the police renewed their attack. One of them walked up to her and hit her a sharp blow on the jaw with the back of his hand. Then two more of them seized her by the shoulders and forced her along the road for a few yards, till her clothes began to tear off with the violence of the struggle, and they let her go once more.

She sprang up at once when they did so. ‘ Let this be the barrack’s yard, if you wish it,’ she cried out, tearing off the rags that still clung about her. ‘ Let this be the barrack’s yard, and come on now, the lot of you.’

Then she rushed at them with extraordinary fury ; but the police, to avoid scandal, withdrew into the town, and left her to be quieted by her friends.

Sometimes, it is fair to add, the police are generous and good-humoured. One evening, many years ago, when Whit-Monday in Enniskerry was a very different thing from what it is now, I was looking out of a window in that village, watching the police, who had been brought in for the occasion, getting ready to start for Bray. As they were standing about, a young ballad-singer came along from the Dargle, and one of the policemen, who seemed to know him, asked him why a fine, stout lad the like of him wasn’t earning his bread, instead of straying on the roads.

Immediately the young man drew up on the spot where he was, and began shouting a loud ballad at the top of his voice. The police tried to stop him ; but he went on, getting faster and faster, till he ended, swinging his head from side to side, in a furious patter, of which I seem to remember —

Botheration
Take the nation,
Calculation,
In the stable,
Cain and Abel,
Tower of Babel,
And the Battle of Waterloo.

Then he pulled off his hat, dashed in among the police, and did not leave them till they had all given him the share of money he felt he had earned for his bread.

In all the circumstances of this tramp life there is a certain wildness that gives it romance and a peculiar value for those who look at life in Ireland with an eye that is aware of the arts also. In all the healthy movements of art, variations from the ordinary types of manhood are made interesting for the ordinary man, and in this way only the higher arts are universal. Beside this art, however, founded on the variations which are a condition and effect of all vigorous life, there is another art—sometimes confounded with it—founded on the freak of nature, in itself a mere sign of atavism or disease. This latter art, which is occupied with the antics of the freak, is of interest only to the variation from ordinary minds, and for this reason is never universal. To be quite plain, the tramp in real life, Hamlet and Faust in the arts, are variations ; but the maniac in real life, and Des Esseintes and all his ugly crew in the arts, are freaks only.

The Oppression of The Hills

AMONG the cottages that are scattered through the hills of County Wicklow I have met with many people who show in a singular way the influence of a particular locality. These people live for the most part beside old roads and pathways where hardly one man passes in the day, and look out all the year on unbroken barriers of heath. At every season heavy rains fall for often a week at a time, till the thatch drips with water stained to a dull chestnut, and the floor in the cottages seems to be going back to the condition of the bogs near it. Then the clouds break, and there is a night of terrific storm from the south-west—all the larches that survive in these places are bowed and twisted towards the point where the sun rises in June—when the winds come down through the narrow glens with the congested whirl and roar of a torrent, breaking at times for sudden moments of silence that keep up the tension of the mind. At such times the people crouch all night over a few sods of turf, and the dogs howl in the lanes.

When the sun rises there is a morning of almost supernatural radiance, and even the oldest men and women come out into the air with the joy of children who have recovered from a fever. In the evening it is raining again. This peculiar climate, acting on a population that is already lonely and dwindling, has caused or increased a tendency to nervous depression among the people, and every degree of sadness, from that of the man who is merely mournful to that of the man who has spent half his life in the madhouse, is common among these hills.

Not long ago in a desolate glen in the south of the county I met two policemen driving an ass-cart with a coffin on it, and a little further on I stopped an old man and asked him what had happened.

‘ This night three weeks,’ he said, ‘ there was a poor fellow below reaping in the glen, and in the evening he had two glasses of whisky with some other lads. Then some excitement took him, and he threw off his clothes and ran away into the hills. There was great rain that night, and I suppose the poor creature lost his way, and was the whole night perishing in the rain and darkness. In the morning they found his naked footmarks on some mud half a mile above the road, and again where you go up by a big stone. Then there was nothing known of him till last night, when they found his body on the mountain, and it near eaten by the crows.’

Then he went on to tell me how different the country had been when he was a young man.

‘ We had nothing to eat at that time,’ he said, ‘ but milk and stirabout and potatoes, and there was a fine constitution you wouldn’t meet this day at all. I remember when you’d see forty boys and girls below there on a Sunday evening, playing ball and diverting themselves ; but now all this country is gone lonesome and bewildered, and there’s no man knows what ails it.’

There are so few girls left in these neighbourhoods that one does not often meet with women that have grown up unmarried. I know one, however, who has lived by herself for fifteen years in a tiny hovel near a cross roads much frequented by tinkers and ordinary tramps. As she has no one belonging to her, she spends a good deal of her time wandering through the country, and I have met her in every direction, often many miles from her own glen. ‘ I do be so afeard of the tramps,’ she said to me one evening. ‘ I live all alone, and what would I do at all if one of them lads was to come near me ? When my poor mother was dying, “ Now, Nanny,” says she, “ don’t be living on here when I am dead,” says she ; “ it’d be too lonesome.” And now I wouldn’t wish to go again’ my mother, and she dead—dead or alive I wouldn’t go again’ my mother—but I’m after doing all I can, and I can’t get away by any means.” As I was moving on she heard, or thought she heard, a sound of distant thunder.

‘ Ah, your honour,’ she said, ‘ do you think it’s thunder we’ll be having ? There’s nothing I fear like the thunder. My heart isn’t strong—I do feel it—and I have a lightness in my head, and often when I do be excited with the thunder I do be afeard I might die there alone in the cottage and no one know it. But I do hope that the Lord—bless His holy name !—has something in store for me. I’ve done all I can, and I don’t like going again’ my mother and she dead. And now good evening, your honour, and safe home.’

Intense nervousness is common also with much younger women. I remember one night hearing some one crying out and screaming in the house where I was staying. I went downstairs and found it was a girl who had been taken in from a village a few miles away to help the servants. That afternoon her two younger sisters had come to see her, and now she had been taken with a panic that they had been drowned going home through the bogs, and she was crying and wailing, and saying she must go to look for them. It was not thought fit for her to leave the house alone so late in the evening, so I went with her. As we passed down a steep hill of heather, where the nightjars were clapping their wings in the moonlight, she told me a long story of the way she had been frightened. Then we reached a solitary cottage on the edge of the bog, and as a light was still shining in the window, I knocked at the door and asked if they had seen or heard anything. When they understood our errand three half-dressed generations came out to jeer at us on the doorstep.

‘ Ah, Maggie,’ said the old woman, ‘ you’re a cute one. You’re the girl likes a walk in the moonlight. Whist your talk of them big lumps of childer, and look at Martin Edward there, who’s not six, and he can go through the bog five times in an hour and not wet his feet.’

My companion was still unconvinced, so we went on. The rushes were shining in the moonlight, and one flake of mist was lying on the river. We looked into one bog-hole, and then into another, where a snipe rose and terrified us. We listened : a cow was chewing heavily in the shadow of a bush, two dogs were barking on the side of a hill, and there was a cart far away upon the road. Our teeth began to chatter with the cold of the bog air and the loneliness of the night. I could see that the actual presence of the bog had shown my companion the absurdity of her fears, and in a little while we went home.

The older people in County Wicklow, as in the rest of Ireland, still show a curious affection for the landed classes wherever they have lived for a generation or two upon their

property. I remember an old woman, who told me, with tears streaming on her face, how much more lonely the country had become since the ‘ quality ’ had gone away, and gave me a long story of how she had seen her landlord shutting up his house and leaving his property, and of the way he had died afterwards, when the ‘ grievance ’ of it broke his heart. The younger people feel differently, and when I was passing this landlord’s house, not long afterwards, I found these lines written in pencil on the door-post :—

In the days of rack-renting
And land-grabbing so vile
A proud, heartless landlord
Lived here a great while.
When the League it was started,
And the land-grabbing cry,
To the cold North of Ireland
He had for to fly.

A year later the door-post had fallen to pieces, and the inscription with it.

A Landlord’s Garden in County Wicklow

A STONE’S throw from an old house where I spent several summers in County Wicklow, there was a garden that had been left to itself for fifteen or twenty years. Just inside the gate, as one entered, two paths led up through a couple of strawberry beds, half choked with leaves, where a few white and narrow straw-berries were still hidden away. Further on was nearly half an acre of tall raspberry canes and thistles five feet high, growing together in a dense mass, where one could still pick raspberries enough to last a household for the season. Then, in a waste of hemlock, there were some half-dozen apple trees covered with lichen and moss, and against the northern walls a few dying plum trees hanging from their nails. Beyond them there was a dead pear tree, and just inside the gate, as one came back to it, a large fuchsia filled with empty nests. A few lines of box here and there showed where the flower-beds had been laid out, and when anyone who had the knowledge looked carefully among them many remnants could be found of beautiful and rare plants.

All round this garden there was a wall seven or eight feet high, in which one could see three or four tracks with well-worn holes—like the paths down a cliff in Kerry—where boys and tramps came over to steal and take away any apples or other fruits that were in season. Above the wall on the three windy sides there were rows of finely-grown lime trees, the place of meeting in the summer for ten thousand bees. Under the east wall there was the roof of a green-house, where one could sit, when it was wet or dry, and watch the birds and butterflies, many of which were not common. The seasons were always late in this place—it was high above the sea—and red poles often used to nest not far off late in the summer ; siskins did the same once or twice, and greenfinches, till the beginning of August, used to cackle endlessly in the lime trees.

Everyone is used in Ireland to the tragedy that is bound up with the lives of farmers and fishing people ; but in this garden one seemed to feel the tragedy of the landlord class also, and of the innumerable old families that are quickly dwindling away. These owners of the land are not much pitied at the present day, or much deserving of pity ; and yet one cannot quite forget that they are the descendants of what was at one time, in the eighteenth century, a high-spirited and highly-cultivated aristocracy. The broken greenhouses and mouse-eaten libraries, that were designed and collected by men who voted with Grattan, are perhaps as mournful in the end as the four mud walls that are so often left in Wicklow as the only

remnants of a farm-house. The desolation of this life is often of a peculiarly local kind, and if a playwright chose to go through the Irish country houses he would find material, it is likely, for many gloomy plays that would turn on the dying away of these old families, and on the lives of the one or two delicate girls that are left so often to represent a dozen hearty men who were alive a generation or two ago. Many of the descendants of these people have, of course, drifted into professional life in Dublin, or have gone abroad ; yet, wherever they are, they do not equal their forefathers, and where men used to collect fine editions of *Don Quixote* and Molière, in Spanish and French, and luxuriantly bound copies of Juvenal and Persius and Cicero, nothing is read now but Longfellow and Hall Caine and Miss Corelli. Where good and roomy houses were built a hundred years ago, poor and tawdry houses are built now ; and bad bookbinding, bad pictures, and bad decorations are thought well of, where rich bindings, beautiful miniatures, and finely-carved chimney-pieces were once prized by the old Irish landlords.

To return to our garden. One year the apple crop was unusually plentiful, and every Sunday inroads were made upon it by some unknown persons. At last I decided to lie in wait at the dangerous hour—about twelve o'clock—when the boys of the neighbourhood were on their way home from Mass, and we were supposed to be busy with our devotions three miles away. A little before eleven I slipped out, accordingly, with a book, locked the door behind me, put the key in my pocket, and lay down under a bush. When I had been reading for some time, and had quite forgotten the thieves, I looked up at some little stir and saw a young man, in his Sunday clothes, walking up the path towards me. He stopped when he saw me, and for a moment we gazed at each other with astonishment. At last, to make a move, I said it was a fine day. ‘ It is indeed, sir,’ he answered with a smile, and then he turned round and ran for his life. I realized that he was a thief, and jumped up and ran after him, seeing, as I did so, a flock of small boys swarming up the walls of the garden. Meanwhile the young man ran round and round through the raspberry canes, over the strawberry beds, and in and out among the apple trees. He knew that if he tried to get over the wall I should catch him, and that there was no other way out, as I had locked the gate. It was heavy running, and we both began to get weary. Then I caught my foot in a briar and fell. Immediately the young man rushed to the wall and began scrambling up it, but just as he was drawing his leg over the top I caught him by the heel. For a moment he struggled and kicked, then by sheer weight I brought him down at my feet, and an armful of masonry along with him. I caught him by the neck and tried to ask his name, but found we were too breathless to speak.

For I do not know how long we sat glaring at each other, and gasping painfully. Then by degrees I began to upbraid him in a whisper for coming over a person’s wall to steal his apples, when he was such a fine, well-dressed, grown-up young man. I could see that he was in mortal dread that I might have him up in the police courts, which I had no intention of doing, and when I finally asked him his name and address he invented a long story of how he lived six miles away, and had come over to this neighbourhood for Mass and to see a friend, and then how he had got a drought upon him, and thought an apple would put him in spirits for his walk home. Then he swore he would never come over the wall again if I would let him off, and that he would pray God to have mercy on me when my last hour was come. I felt sure his whole story was a tissue of lies, and I did not want him to have the crow of having taken me in. ‘ There is a woman belonging to the place,’ I said, ‘ inside in the house helping the girl to cook the dinner. Walk in now with me, and we’ll see if you’re such a stranger as you’d have me think.’ He looked infinitely troubled, but I took him by the neck and wrist and we set off for the gate. When we had gone a pace or two he stopped. ‘ I beg your pardon,’ he said, ‘ my cap’s after falling down on the over side of the wall. May I cross over and get it ?’ That was too much for me. ‘ Well, go on,’ I said, ‘ and if ever I catch you again woe betide you.’ I let him go then, and he rushed madly over the wall and disappeared. A few days later I

discovered, not at all to my surprise, that he lived half a mile away, and was intimately related to a small boy who came to the house every morning to run messages and clean the boots. Yet it must not be thought that this young man was dishonest ; I would have been quite ready the next day to trust him with a ten-pound note.

Glencree

THIS morning the air is clear, and there is a trace of summer again. I am sitting in a nook beside the stream from the Upper Lake, close down among the heather and bracken and rushes. I have seen the people going up to Mass in the Reformatory, and the valley seems empty of life.

I have gone on, mile after mile, of the road to Sally Gap, between brown dykes and chasms in the turf, with broken foot-bridges across them, or between sheets of sickly moss and bog-cotton that is unable to thrive. The road is caked with moss that breaks like pie-crust under my feet, and in corners where there is shelter there are sheep loitering, or a few straggling grouse. . . . The fog has come down in places ; I am meeting multitudes of hares that run round me at a little distance—looking enormous in the mists—or sit up on their ends against the sky line to watch me going by. When I sit down for a moment the sense of loneliness has no equal. I can hear nothing but the slow running of water and the grouse crowing and chuckling underneath the band of cloud. Then the fog lifts and shows the white empty roads winding everywhere, with the added sense of desolation one gets passing an empty house on the side of a road.

When I turn back again the air has got stuffy and heavy and calm, with a cloud still down upon the glen ; there is a dead heat in the air that is not natural so high up, and the silence is so great three or four wrens that are singing near the lake seem to fill the valley with sound. In most places I can see the straight ending of the cloud, but above the lake grey fingers are coming up and down, like a hand that is clasping and opening again. One longs for rain or wind or thunder. The very ewes and lambs have stopped bleating, and are slinking round among the stacks of turf.

I have come out again on the mountain road the third day of the fog. At first it was misty only, and then a cloud crept up the water gullies from the valley of the Liffey, and in a moment I am cut off in a white silent cloud. The little turfy ridges on each side of the road have the look of glens to me, and every block of stone has the size of a house. The cobwebs on the furze are like a silvery net, and the silence is so great and queer, even weazels run squealing past me on the side of the road. . . . An east wind is rising. Once in every minute I see the little mounds in their natural shapes that have been mountains for a week. I see wet cottages on the other side of the glen that I had forgotten. Then, as I walk on, I see out over a cloud to the tops of real mountains standing up into the sky.

There is a dense white fog around the cottage, and we seem to be shut away from any habitation. All round behind the hills there is a moan and rumble of thunder coming nearer, at times with a fierce and sudden crash. The bracken has a nearly painful green in the strangeness of the light. Enormous sheep are passing in and out of the sky line.

There is a strange depression about the cottage to-night. The woman of the house is taken ill and has got into bed beside her mother-in-law, who is over ninety, and is wandering in her mind. The man of the house has gone away ten miles for medicine, and I am left with the two children, who are playing silently about the door.

The larches in the haggard are dripping heavily with damp, and the hens and geese, bewildered with the noise and gloom, are cackling with uneasy dread. All one's senses are disturbed.

As I walk backwards and forwards, a few yards above and below the door, the little stream I do not see seems to roar out of the cloud.

Every leaf and twig is heavy with drops, and a dog that has passed with a sad-eyed herd looked wet and draggled and afraid.

I remember lying in the heather one clear Sunday morning in the early autumn when the bracken had just turned. All the people of the district were at Mass in a chapel a few miles away, so the valleys were empty, and there was nothing to be heard but the buzzing of a few late bees and the autumn song of thrushes. The sky was covered with white radiant clouds, with soft outlines, broken in a few places by lines of blue sky of wonderful delicacy and clearness. In a little while I heard a step on a path beneath me, and a tramp came wandering round the bottom of the hill. There was a spring below where I was lying, and when he reached it he looked round to see if anyone was watching him. I was hidden by the ferns, so he knelt down beside the water, where there was a pool among the stones, pulled his shirt over his head, and began washing it in the spring. After a little he seemed satisfied, and began wringing the water out of it ; then he put it on, dripping as it was, buttoned his old coat over it, and wandered on towards the village, picking black-berries from the hedge.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The section in this Volume, IN WEST KERRY, was partly re-written from articles which appeared in the *Shanachie*, where some of IN WICKLOW also appeared ; the remainder of the Wicklow articles and the series IN THE CONGESTED DISTRICTS were originally published in the *Manchester Guardian*. The latter series the author intended to revise before reprinting, but his preoccupation with his dramatic work, and eventually his illness, prevented him from doing so. They were, however, included in the Collected Edition as they appeared, and are here reprinted under the title IN CONNEMARA, for although only the hastily written records of a journey through the West of Ireland, they contain many characteristic passages which it is felt those interested in Synge's work will wish to have in this permanent form.

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