

Sligo to Donegal 1834

A Journey Throughout Ireland During the Spring, Summer, and Autumn of 1834

Henry David Inglis

1838

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The first few miles of the road, from Sligo to Boyle, I found to be the same as I had already travelled. I passed through the village of Balisedare ; but then struck to the left, skirting the pretty village of Coloony. Beyond this village I found a fertile and tolerably well cultivated country—a considerable part of it, however, under pasture—and no greater part of it bog-land than might probably be wanted for consumption. I was surprised to meet, every few hundred yards on this road, carts heavily laden with country people, many of them of the lowest orders, and with different articles of furniture piled upon or attached to the carts ; and I learned with some astonishment, that all these individuals were on their way to sea-bathing. This is a universal practice over these parts of Ireland. A few weeks passed at the sea-side is looked upon to be absolutely necessary for the preservation of health ; and persons of all classes migrate thither, with their families. In my way to Boyle, I met upwards of twenty carts laden with women, children, and boys. One may ask how the people afford this annual expense ; but the expense is extremely small. There are numerous cabins and cottages, at the lower end of Sligo, on the bay, in which a room is hired at 1s. 6d per week. This is almost the whole of the expense ; for all carry with them,—besides their beds and an iron pot,—a quantity of meal, some sacks of potatoes, and even turf, if there be room for it.

The road to Boyle runs all the way by the side of the river Arrow ; a pretty, clear, rapid stream, as its name would denote ; and flowing out of a lake of the same name. After reaching the lake, the road continues to skirt its bank, though the grounds attached to some gentleman's seats intervene between the road and the lake. Loch Arrow is a pretty lake, about seven miles long, and from one to two broad ; and without presenting any very striking beauties, the scenery of its shores is of a very pleasing kind. There are sloping, green, and cultivated banks ; finely wooded promontories,—low but stretching far into the lake ; and some very green islands, reposing on the still waters.

After leaving Loch Arrow, the road ascended considerably, and passed through a wilder and very poor country. I never saw poorer cabins than in passing through this district. Many of them were not to be distinguished from the mud heaps around ; they were fully as black, and no bigger ; and built of the same material. Scarcely a patch of cultivation was visible around any of them.

The first view of Boyle and its neighbourhood, from the heights by which I approached, is very striking. Loch Key, and the adjacent splendid domain of Lord Lorton, with its spreading woods and islands, lie a few miles to the left ; and Boyle itself, far below, yet built on a rising ground, embosomed in wood, looks like a spot where one might expect to find comfort and repose. And this expectation is not disappointed ; for the inn at Boyle—there is but one—is excellent, and offers an agreeable contrast to the more ambitious hotel at Sligo. Let me not omit to do a good turn, when I chance to have an opportunity. After spending three days, very uncomfortably at one hotel in Sligo, I tried the hotel kept by Mrs. Ross ; and I recommend all travellers to try Mrs. Ross in the first instance. There is nothing very attractive without, but there is a fair share of comfort within.

Boyle is a very pretty town, situated on a fine rapid river, of the same name. It is but a very small town, but it is neat and tolerably clean, and has a great deal of wood, and a fine country round it. It also contains a particularly fine ruin, called Boyle Abbey : certainly one of the most beautiful ruins I have seen in Ireland. There is a nave, a choir, and transepts, and a square tower rising from the centre of the cross. One pauses too under many fine arches, and surveys some curious workmanship ; and the mere lover of the picturesque will be greatly gratified with the general

outline of the ruin, —its situation, the moss-grown and ivied walls, and the great ash- tree that grows within them.

The town, and whole district of country round, is the property of Lord Lorton. I spent some time in the neighbourhood of Boyle, and made myself acquainted, as far as I was able, with the condition of the people. This I found to be very various. All who held their land on old leases, I found to be comfortable : rents were decidedly low : and the farmers admitted that they could pay their rent, and even save a little money. Lord Lorton has lately divided those holdings which have lapsed, into farms of sixteen acres each, and given new leases : no smaller holdings than these are allowed. In the present state of Ireland, I have my doubts whether a landlord be justified in this course, unless he has a tract of unreclaimed land, whereon to offer those a holding who are dispossessed ; or pays the expense of emigration, for those who wish to take advantage of it. Driving for rent is not practised on Lord Lorton's estate. When three half-years are unpaid, the tenant is ejected ; but the arrear is forgiven. There is no reasonable objection to this course ; but if the adoption of it becomes frequently necessary, the necessity of having recourse to it might naturally suggest a reduction of rent. The new leases on these estates are for short periods, and the rents are not exorbitantly high. Many very small holders are located on the land in this neighbourhood, by the farmers who hold old leases. These, in conformity with the system pursued by Lord Lorton, will by and by be cleared. The tenants on this estate pay nothing for turf, and some poor creatures are permitted to earn a trifle by cutting and selling it in the town. I should say of the agriculturists of this part of Ireland generally, that they are able to pay their rents, and live off their land. I noticed great deficiency of cross roads in this part of the country. Many farmers and farm-houses appeared to have scarcely any access to them at all.

In my visits among the country people here, I could not help making an observation, which had been repeatedly forced upon my attention in other parts of Ireland ; I allude to the less affection that exists between man and wife, among the country people in Ireland, than is found to adorn domestic life in the humbler spheres on the other side of the water. I think no one can have visited many of the Irish cabins and farm-houses, without having been struck with this fact. Marriage is not, among these classes in Ireland, the same thing which it is among the like classes in England. It is seldom the result of long and tried affection on both sides ; but is either a rash step, taken by unthinking children, or else a mere mercenary bargain, in which the woman has little voice, and in which her partner is actuated solely by sordid views. I have no doubt that the effects of this are not altogether unimportant as regards the condition of the people of Ireland. Who can say, how much of those home comforts which are gathered around the hearth of an English country fireside, is the result of that strife for mutual happiness, which can arise only from mutual affection ; or how much of that utter want of and indifference to comfort, which characterize an Irish cabin, may arise from the absence of domestic feelings ?

Rockingham-house, the seat of Lord Lorton, is situated about five miles from Boyle, and is every way a magnificent place. The domain is of great extent, and nature and art have combined to render it attractive. It is seldom that so fine a lake as Loch Key lies partly within a domain ; but Rockingham possesses this advantage. The house stands upon an elevation, sloping down to the lake, which, with its many wooded islands and promontories, is spread out below. These islands are extremely beautiful : fine timber and delightful verdure cover most of them ; and upon some are seen the ruins of castles and of religious edifices.

Rockingham-house is one of the most celebrated in Ireland. Mr. Nield, in his survey of the county of Roscommon, says, “ One of the most striking peculiarities of the house, consists in its very insulated position, no office of any kind being visible ; but the whole being surmounted by beautiful shorn grass, interspersed with beds of flowers and ornamented walks. This arrangement has been effected by having most of the offices of the basement story covered over, and subterranean passages carried from underneath the eminence on which the house stands, towards the lake, in one direction, and in another, towards the stables, which stand at a considerable distance,

screened by trees ; the covered passage, however, does not reach the whole way to the latter ; but merely far enough to prevent the appearance of movement near the mansion.” Rockingham-house has another peculiarity. It is built solely of marble ; of which a specimen of the highest polish, and of an ornamental form, is seen on the great staircase. The marble was obtained from a quarry belonging to Lord Lorton, on these estates. Every part of Lord Lorton’s domain is kept in excellent order ; and his lordship constantly employs a great many men upon his estate, at 1s. per day.

I now left Boyle for Enniskillen, by slow and short journeys. For several miles after leaving Boyle, the road skirts Lord Lorton’s domain, and then passes through a rather fine country, to Carrick-on-Shannon. Here, I again found that majestic river which I had parted from a month before : and I still found it the same noble stream. The Shannon, at Carrick, is upwards of two hundred miles from the sea ; and I scarcely could discover any diminution of the stream, which flows a hundred miles lower down. From Carrick and its neighbourhood, I made two excursions ; one down, and another up the river. There is much interest in the banks of the river for ten or twelve miles down, passing Jamestown and Drumsna. Up the river, the interest is less. Leitrim is a miserable little place ; and betwixt that town,—the last on the Shannon,—and Loch Allen, there is little attraction. Loch Allen is certainly the true source of the Shannon. Like every other lake. Loch Allen has its feeders. Two considerable streams fall in at its head ; and many small rivulets,—upwards of twenty in number,—fall into it from different directions around ; but these are the feeders of Loch Allen, not the source of the Shannon. It is only where a great river enters a lake, after a long previous course, that the lake is not properly the source of the river which flows out of it. Such, for example, is the Rhone, which, after a long course, enters the lake of Geneva, which is nothing more than an expansion of the Rhone : but as nothing deserving the name of a river flows into the head of Loch Allen, the loch is certainly entitled to be considered the source of the Shannon.

Loch Allen is not in itself an interesting, or beautiful, or picturesque lake ; neither is the scenery on its banks sufficiently bold, to make the smallest approach to grandeur : it is merely wild and solitary ; and the only further interest which the lake possesses, arises from its being the source of the Shannon. The lake is embosomed in hills of a moderate elevation, not picturesque in their outline, nor clothed with wood ; and there are some, though not many, islands scattered over its surface ; and upon one of them, a small monastic remain is still visible. Loch Allen is about seven miles long, and varies from one to four in breadth ; and its average depth is said to be greater than any of the lower expansions of the Shannon. The chief mountain boundary of the lake, is “ the Iron Mountain,”—so designated from the riches which it contains in this valuable metal. In all the gullies which have been worn by the mountain floods, iron ore is to be found in great abundance, both in large masses and in minute particles ; and the under strata of the neighbouring heights is composed of alternate layers of iron and limestone. It is now more than forty years since iron works have been established in this neighbourhood, known by the name of the Arigna iron works,—Arigna being the name of the stream which flows by them, and which joins the Shannon, just as it flows out of Loch Allen,—one branch of the river, indeed, emptying itself into the lake. Little advantage has hitherto resulted from working the Arigna iron works ; but there is little reason to doubt, that—the Shannon navigation being now extended to Loch Allen—capital embarked in these works would find a profitable investment.

I had now seen the banks of the Shannon from its mouth to its source ; and I think I may venture to say, that although we cannot find on the banks of the Shannon that precipitous wood scenery, which distinguishes the Rhine, nor the extreme richness and softness, which lie along the Loire, or the Garonne, infinitely greater variety is found throughout the course of the Shannon, than is presented either on these or any other rivers that I recollect. And the Shannon possesses one attribute, which, as far as I know, is exclusively its own. It is navigable (with some slight interruptions) from its mouth to its source, a distance of 234 miles. In the extent of its navigation, therefore, though not of its course, it ranks with many of the great continental rivers. The interruptions to its navigation, which consist of rapids here and there, have all been overcome by canal cuts ; though much yet remains to be done, both in improving the canals, and the navigation of the river itself. The whole

fall of the Shannon, from Loch Allen to the sea, is one hundred and forty-six feet,—which is only seven inches and a fraction in a mile : and it is a curious fact, that the greatest fall is not during the first part of its course, which one might naturally expect, but in that part which approaches the sea. From Killaloe to Limerick, a distance of but fifteen miles, the fall is ninety-seven feet ; and from the source of the river to Killaloe, the whole fall is but forty-nine feet.

I now left Carrick for Enniskillen. The road from Carrick to Ballinamore possesses but little interest. A number of small lakes, with one of considerable size, lie on both sides of the road ; but none of them possess any remarkable attractions ; and the country is in general poor, and badly cultivated. I visited one or two houses on the road, the dwellings of small landholders, and found the inmates in a very poor condition, and holding their land under men as needy as themselves.

Ballinamore is a small town, existing, and existing very badly, by agriculture. The whole of the neighbourhood, with very few exceptions, is fearfully rack-rented : the land, which is generally poor, is let by competition to the highest bidder ; and rents are covenanted for, that can never be paid. The property of Lord Southwell, however, which is situated in this district, is an exception. It is unquestionably amongst the nobility, and the largest proprietors, that these exceptions are chiefly to be found,—a fact that may probably be attributable to the better circumstances of the great proprietors, who are not, generally, so embarrassed as the smaller landowners. I found that the landholders in the neighbourhood of Ballinamore were necessitated to send every particle of produce, except potatoes, to market, to make up their rents ; and that they lived as miserably as the owner of the poorest cabin.

The country between Ballinamore and Swanlinbar,—part of which is in Leitrim county, part in Cavan,—I found very little more interesting than that between Carrick and Ballinamore. There is a poverty look about everything. The country is but half cultivated ; and it supports a needy gentry, crushed farmers, and a miserable peasantry. After passing Swanlinbar, things improve. Improvement is visible in the aspect of the country ; and a decided improvement in the appearance of the houses and their inhabitants.

I remained a day in this neighbourhood (not in Swanlinbar), that I might have an opportunity of visiting Florence Court, the seat of the Earl of Enniskillen, and the surrounding country. This beautiful seat is situated at the foot of a fine chain of hills ; and the unequal surface of the ground over which his lordship's park extends, gives great picturesqueness to the views, and has materially assisted art, in the embellishments which she has scattered around. Many fine old trees beautify this domain, and the grouping of wood is very effective. Florence Court wants water only, to make it a paradise. This mansion is every way worthy of the grounds which surround it.

The approach to Enniskillen, from Swanlinbar, struck me greatly. A rich, broken, and beautiful country lies on either side of the road ; a mountain outline bounds the greater part of the horizon ; and the town of Enniskillen itself rises on the opposite side of a broad sheet of water, covering a considerable extent of elevated ground, and presenting a bold front of strong bastions and grey walls.

The situation of Enniskillen is every way delightful. Loch Erne, the noblest, in point of extent, of any of the Irish lakes, and which has been called the Winandermere of Ireland,—an appellation which I shall by and by endeavour to show, it is well entitled to,—spreads into an upper and lower lake, above and below the town, though, from the distance between them, which is not less than four miles, they ought rather to be considered two distinct lakes. This communication between the two lakes is not more than river breadth, and in one part separates into two branches, encircling a tolerably elevated island ; and upon this island stands the town of Enniskillen. Two handsome bridges connect the town with the mainland, at each end of the island ; and almost the whole of the island is covered by the town. On the opposite banks of the water, on both sides of the town, the scenery is of the most *riant* description. When I visited the neighbourhood, the corn harvest was

just beginning, and the hay harvest was nearly over. On the sunny slopes that rise on all sides, the golden fields of ripe corn were beautifully mingled with the brilliant green that follows the destruction of the meadow. Abundance of wood, and the broken surface of the country, gave sufficient shade to the landscape, which was, on all sides, imaged in the still, deep, broad waters that surround the town ; and altogether, I shall long preserve in my memory the recollection of this beautiful spot.

But this is not all I have to say in favour of Enniskillen ; I found it *one of* the most respectable-looking towns I had seen in Ireland ; and its population, by far *the most* respectable-looking, that I had anywhere yet seen. I speak of course of the lower classes ; and I make no exception of either Dublin, or Cork, or Limerick, or any other place. I saw a population,— the first I had yet seen,— without rags ; I saw scarcely a bare foot, even among the girls ; there was a neat, tidy look among the women, who had not, as in other places, their uncombed hair hanging about their ears ; and the men appeared to me to have a decent farmer-like appearance.

Enniskillen is a busy, and a rising town ; improvement it everywhere discernible. Many new buildings are seen ; thatched houses, scarcely at all ; and the suburbs even are respectable. Enniskillen abounds in respectable shops ; and I never saw shops better filled than they were on market day ; I understood that many of the tradespeople were wealthy, and that the retail trade is brisk and profitable. This, and the generally improving condition of the town, which possesses but little manufacture, are evidences of the prosperous condition of the surrounding agricultural population—and, by implication, speaks favourably also of the land-lords. Lords Enniskillen, Ely, and Belmore, are the three great proprietors ; but there are many resident gentlemen besides. The town belongs altogether to Lord Enniskillen, who is generally well spoken of, and who in letting his land endeavours to ascertain its real value. I found the farmers of this neighbourhood enjoying some comforts, and not so ground down to the earth as in the south and west. Potatoes are not the sole diet here : the country is a most fruitful one ; and much of the wheat and oats is consumed in the surrounding district. There is some export of grain to Derry, Armagh, &c., but the greater part is consumed. The export of live cattle and pigs, from Enniskillen to Derry, is also considerable. Most important advantages would accrue to Enniskillen, by opening an inland navigation to the sea : and nothing could be easier than this. From the town, there is already an uninterrupted navigation through Loch Erne, to the exit of the river, which, not eight miles distant from the lake, falls into the bay of Donegal : and half of this distance, the river is already navigable ; so that it requires but a cut of four miles to open a water communication, not only from Enniskillen, but from the upper lake to the sea,—a distance of not less than sixty miles. It is almost impossible to calculate the benefit which would be conferred upon the great extent of country bordering on the two Loch Ernes, by this very obvious and unexpensive undertaking.

Enniskillen enjoys also a considerable linen trade. From three to four hundred pieces are sold at each fortnight's market ; and it speaks well for the prospects of the trade, that many merchants leave the market disappointed of purchases ; and that three times the quantity actually sold, would find buyers if it were brought to market. It is a fact, that greatly more flax seed has been sown this year, than on any former year.

The population of Enniskillen is about one-third Protestant : and the town and neighbourhood are Conservative in their politics. Three newspapers are published in the town, all Conservative. One is Toryish, a second Tory, and a third high Tory. It is singular, that in a town like this, there should be no circulating or public library.

The price of provisions in Enniskillen is reasonable. When I visited it, potatoes were at 3 ½ d. a stone ; 120 lbs. of oatmeal were sold at 8s. 6d. ; second quality of flour was 1s. 6d. per stone. Meat was from 5d. to 6d. per lb. ; fine fowls, 10d. a couple. Labour in town was at 1s. a day ; but for constant employment, 10d. ; and in the country did not exceed 8d. The provision and retail trade of Enniskillen is of course benefited by the town being military head-quarters. During eight months in

the year there is pretty full employment for labour in Enniskillen. Just before the corn harvest began, and after the hay harvest had finished, I saw about eighty persons in want of employment, and waiting for hire.

One of the most finished domains in Ireland,—or, I might say, in the British dominions, is Castle Coole, the seat of the Earl of Belmore. It contains within it an extraordinary variety of fine scenery. The disposition of wood, water, and lawn, is as near perfection as can be produced by the union of nature and art. The beech and oak trees, everywhere scattered over the park, are of the most gigantic dimensions ; and there is a beautiful specimen of close sylvan scenery, where the game is preserved. Within the park, too, are several smooth oval mounts, beautiful to look upon, and from which all the charming variety of the landscape is seen to perfection. I climbed to the top of the conical hill above the castle, called Topid, and enjoyed a very extensive, and certainly a very engaging prospect. Among the objects most con-spicuous in the landscape, are two round hills towards the north, called Bessy Bell, and Mary Gray,—names familiar to every one.

The mansion of Castle Coole is the finest house in the modern style, that I had seen in Ireland. There is a beautiful facade ; a portico, with four columns in the centre, supporting a pediment ; and two equal wings are connected with the centre, by handsome colonnades of fluted pillars, of the Doric order. The interior is equally magnificent ; and splendid mirrors, porphyry pilasters, and inlaid doors, remind one of the palaces and churches of Italy and Spain.

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Devenish Island, and its Round Tower—Kesh—Loch Erne, the Winandermere of Ireland—
Character of the Lake—The County of Fermanagh, and its Population—The Clergy of the
Church of Ireland—Church Reform—Land, Land-owners, and Landholders—Labourers—
Journey to Loch Dergh—Pettigo—Loch Dergh, and its Island—The Pilgrims—Details of the
Doings there—Visit to the Island—Extraordinary Scenes—Further Details—Popularity of this
Pilgrims.

ONE of the most interesting spots in the neighbourhood of Enniskillen, is Devenish island, with its round tower, and other ancient relics. It stands just where the lower lake expands ; and is about two miles from Enniskillen. One may visit it either by boat from Enniskillen, or follow the road from the town, and make use of the ferry-boat. The island slopes gently from the water's edge, in a fine green swell, but is entirely destitute of wood ; and is said to contain upwards of seventy acres. The round tower of Devenish is considered to be the most perfect in Ireland, and, altogether, the finest specimen of these singular structures. The height of the tower is eighty-two feet ; the thickness of its walls three feet five inches ; the circumference forty-nine feet ; and the diameter, inside, nine feet two inches. Twelve feet above the doorway there is a window, angularly pointed ; and, higher up, another window, nearly square. Still higher are the four windows, common in all these towers ; and the key-stone, above each, is ornamented with a human head.

But the round tower is not the only relic on Devenish island. There are also several monastic remains ; particularly the ruins of an abbey, which is situated on the most elevated part of the island. Some parts of the abbey are yet in a considerably perfect state of preservation, particularly the tower ; from the summit of which an extensive prospect is enjoyed over the lake and the surrounding country. The other remains, on the island, are in a less perfect state ; and their workmanship is of a far ruder description than that by which the abbey is distinguished. Next to the rock of Cashel, I look upon Devenish island to be the most interesting spot in Ireland, to those who are attracted by the union of the antique and the picturesque.

I left Enniskillen, greatly pleased with the town and its neighbourhood. I had seen no such fine and fruitful country since I had visited the counties of Tipperary and Limerick ; but there is greater beauty here, united to as much cultivation. The country about Enniskillen is more undulating and

wavy ; and the distant outlines are more striking : nor had I seen in any town in Ireland a population so little ragged, and altogether so respectable.

It is very likely that many of my readers never heard of the town of Kesh, or Kish, as some call it. It is a small, a very small town, or rather a village, situated near to the right bank of Loch Erne, about ten miles from Enniskillen. Here, or at least in its neighbourhood, I remained for three or four days, making myself acquainted with the beautiful lake close by ; and observing and inquiring into the condition of the inhabitants of the neighbouring country. The road, between Enniskillen and Kesh, does not keep all the way close to the lake, though sufficiently near to enable the traveller to catch beautiful glimpses ; and, now and then, to command the greater part of its expanse. Ely Lodge, the residence of the Marquis of Ely, and its surrounding grounds, are seen to great advantage on the road to Kesh. They lie on the opposite side of the lake, just at the point where the road first begins to skirt it.

I said that Loch Erne has been called the Winandermere of Ireland ; and that it might be easy to justify the propriety of the appellation, which was, no doubt, intended as a compliment to Loch Erne. In length, breadth, and shape. Loch Erne and Winandermere do not greatly differ ; and inasmuch as the character of beauty, rather than of sublimity, is applicable to both, the comparison is just. I presume it is on account of these resemblances, that Loch Erne and Winandermere have been likened to each other. I think, however, that if the claims of these two lakes were examined more in detail. Loch Erne would bear away the palm ; and chiefly upon this ground, that there is no part of it without high claims to beauty ; whereas the lower end of Winandermere is greatly deficient in those attractions which have earned so high a reputation for the lake generally ; but which are chiefly to be found in the centre and upper parts of it. Loch Erne, round its whole circumference, does not offer one tame and uninteresting view; everywhere there is beauty, and beauty of a very high order. In some places, the banks are thickly wooded to the water's edge : in other places, the fairest and smoothest slopes rise from the margin, shaping themselves into knolls and green velvety lawns ; here and there, finely wooded promontories extend far into the lake, forming calm sequestered inlets and bays ; and, sometimes, a bold fore-ground—not perhaps of mountains, but of lofty hills—juts forward, and contrasts finely with the richness and cultivation on either side. And what shall I say of the numerous islands—hoc more numerous than those on Winandermere, and as beautiful as the most beautiful of them ;—some of them densely covered with wood ; some green and swelling ; and some large enough to exhibit the richest union of wood and lawn ; some laid out as pleasure-grounds, with “ pleasure-houses,” for those to whom they pertain ; and some containing the picturesque ruins of ancient and beautiful edifices ! Nor must I forget the magnificent mansions that adorn the banks of Loch Erne, and which add greatly to the general effect of the landscape. Without making any enumeration of these, I would particularize Ely Lodge. Castle Caldwell, and the charming domain of General Archdall, rich in all that constitutes the perfection of beauty.

I shall not easily forget,—nor would I ever wish to forget, the delightful hours I one day spent on the shores of this more than Winandermere of Ireland. It was a day of uncommon beauty : the islands seemed to be floating on a crystal sea ; the wooded promontories threw their broad shadows half across the still bays ; the fair slopes, and lawny knolls, stood greenly out from among the dark sylvan scenery that intervened ; here and there, a little boat rested on the bosom of some quiet cove ; and in some of the shallow bays, or below the slopes of some of the green islands, cattle stood, single or in groups, in the water. I confidently assert, that lower Loch Erne, take it all in all, is the most beautiful lake in the three kingdoms ; and but for the majestic Alpine outline that bounds the horizon on the upper part of Lake Lemman,—Lake Lemman itself could not contend in beauty, with this little-visited lake in the county of Fermanagh.

The county of Fermanagh is Conservative, and considerably Protestant. It will, no doubt, be deemed a curious fact, that the parish in which I rested a few days, Magher-Culmoony,—a parish fourteen Irish miles long and several broad,—contains not any one place of worship, of any

denomination, except the parish church. It is doubtful if there be another example of this in Ireland, or, I might perhaps add, in England either. Such examples would not have been so rare, if the church of Ireland had possessed more ministers of religion, like, in character, activity, and talent, to the Protestant rector of Magher-Culmoony. I am not one of those who ascribe *all* the evils of Ireland to Popery ; but I am one of those who think Protestantism the better religion for the people, and the safer for the state ; and think also, that it ought to have been, and ought still to be, the study of government, to encourage the growth of Protestantism, by every wise and legitimate means ; nor can I let slip this opportunity of observing, from all I have seen and learned in Ireland, that one of the most certain means of increasing Protestantism in Ireland, will be, such measures of reform in the Irish church, as will encourage and reward the working clergy, at the expense of those who do not, or who will not work ; as will sweep away pluralities, and forbid non-residence ; as will place Protestant education on a better footing ; and as will provide for the final and effectual settlement of the tithe question.

But to return to the parish of which I was speaking. During the incumbency of the present minister, the Protestant congregation has increased more than one half : and in the adjoining parish of Fintona, under the same individual, the results of piety and activity are equally favourable. A Protestant congregation of seven hundred, may be seen there any Sunday ; and the Protestant congregation has increased at least one-third within the last few years. The tithe in the parish of Magher-Culmoony is under the Commutation Act, and averages scarcely ten-pence the Irish acre.

Not having had a previous acquaintance with Ireland before visiting it in the present year, I cannot speak from personal knowledge, of the improvement in conduct, and activity, which is said to have taken place within the last few years, amongst the clergy of the church of Ireland. I can speak, however, of what I have seen. I have seen many pious and well-intentioned men ; but few active men. I have seen some, whose conduct was little in unison with their calling ; and I have seen many, whose listlessness rendered their calling ineffectual for any good purpose. This, however, I can say with perfect truth ; that wherever a really good and judiciously zealous clergyman is found, respect attends him ; and results favourable to Protestantism follow his ministrations. That which Protestantism wants in Ireland, is a resident working clergy, placed in comfortable circumstances ; and in the zeal for church reform, I trust it will not be forgotten, that twenty, or ten Protestants require, equally as if their numbers were hundreds in place of tens, and have an equal right to demand, a Protestant house to go to, and a clergyman to administer to them the consolations of religion.

The condition of the land occupiers in the baronies of Fermanagh, is superior to the condition of the same classes in most other parts which I had visited. But, at the same time, looking merely to externals, and especially judging by the houses in which the people live, one would certainly form too favourable conclusions. The love of a neat exterior, which is observable in this district, and in many other districts of the north, is not so much the result of superior condition, as of other causes, the chief of which is, that very many of the landholders are Scotch and English by descent ; and that the force of example has prevailed. Another reason is, that there are many resident gentry, most of whom are unembarrassed in their circumstances. From attentive observation and anxious inquiry, I have reason to say, that rents throughout this county are from 5*s.* to 8*s.* an acre too high ; with the exception of the old takes. The utmost industry is required, in order that a man may pay his rent, and live in any-thing like comfort ; but in order that there should be an accumulation of capital amongst farmers, rents would require to be lower. I should certainly say, however, that any industrious farmer, occupying a fair-sized farm, may be comfortable in this county, though he may not be able to get rich. The produce of an acre of good land here, may be worth 8*l.* ; and at 25*s.* rent, a fair profit is secured. I found all admit,—both Protestant and Catholic farmers,—that they could afford to eat meat three times a week, and as much milk and butter as were required for their families ; or if they chose to live more abstemiously, that they could lay aside a little money. One individual paying 30*s.* an acre for a moderate-sized farm, but of which the land was of the best quality, told me he could afford to eat meat every day. I would have rents and charges upon land

such, however, as might enable a man to lay by a little money, without being obliged to do so at the expense of comfort.

The wages of labour here, are usually ten-pence without diet, or sixpence with diet ; but day labourers are not common. The usual practice is to keep farm servants, who get from 3*l.* to 5*l.* a year. I found a good many small cottiers, owning a quarter of an acre or so, and a cabin. These small holdings were under the farmers ; and the agreement generally was, to give for their holding four days' labour in the week. This is exorbitantly high ; it leaves little more than a hundred days ; labour for all that life requires, beyond the produce of a quarter of an acre of potato land. The conacre system is also common here, and in most parts of Fermanagh : and the rent per acre is from 8*l.* to 10*l.*

I now left the neighbourhood of Kesh to visit that famous resort of ignorance and superstition. Loch Dergh, and St. Patrick's Purgatory. From Kesh to Pettigo, a little town about six miles distant, situated at the head of Loch Erne, I passed through an agreeable country, almost all under tillage, but exhibiting abundant evidence of a very backward state of husbandry. It was on the 12th of August that I passed through Pettigo ; and I found many of the houses decorated with orange flags ; and some zealous Orangemen had erected arches across the road, with emblems and inscriptions, beneath which the pilgrims going to Loch Dergh were obliged to pass.

From Pettigo to Loch Dergh, the distance is about three miles, over bog and mountain. It is a scramble all the way, endeavouring to avoid the marsh and bog land, that cannot, however, be avoided ; and one at length thinks of following the example of the pilgrims, who, with bare feet, get over the difficulties of the path with comparative ease. It is said, that no road is constructed here, lest the devotions of the pilgrims should be interrupted by the presence of too many heretics. It proved a very toilsome journey, and it was with much satisfaction that I espied Loch Dergh in the hollow below. Nothing can be more desolate than the landscape around Loch Dergh. Barren heathy hills surround it on all sides, possessing neither form nor elevation, to give the slightest interest to the scene. The lake is considered to be about nine miles in circumference. As I descended towards the shore of the lake, I could see that the island, which is not quite a mile from the shore, was entirely covered with persons ; and on the bank, which I soon reached, I found upwards of two hundred pilgrims waiting to be ferried over. They were generally respectably dressed. Some were sitting, some lying on the grass ; some, more impatient, were standing close to the water, waiting the arrival of the ferryboat ; and some, more impatient still, had been wanned into devotion, by the distant view of the holy place, and were already on their knees. They were of all ages ; and about three-fourths of the number were women.

At length the ferry-boat arrived from the island, bringing a cargo of those whose penances were concluded ; and who did not generally exhibit in their appearance and countenances, that expression of satisfaction which might be expected amongst those, who had just abridged by some thousands of years, the term of their purgatory. The boat having discharged its cargo, a new cargo was quickly found ; and before I was permitted to approach the holy place, it was necessary that I should send the letter with which I was provided, to the prior, who might grant or refuse the leave requested.

Meanwhile, until the boat should return with the reply, I took advantage of my opportunities ; and improved my acquaintance with some of the pilgrims,—women,—who had returned from the island, and who were resting on the grass before commencing their home-ward journey. I chanced fortunately to light upon a group of very communicative persons, who seemed more desirous of telling than of concealing,—with the view, no doubt, of exalting the excellence and advantages of the services in which they had been engaged ; and as one reason for telling me some of the secrets of Loch Dergh, they said, that I, being a Protestant, should not be able to see anything on the island. I thought, at first, they meant that the holy doings there would be miraculously concealed from the profane eyes of a heretic : but I found that the hindrances were to be merely human. I was told, that the moment it was known to the prior, that a stranger was about to visit the island, orders were

issued to suspend all devotions : and this I afterwards found to be true. The pilgrims may remain at the station three days, six days, or nine days ; and some have even been so far indulged, as to have permission granted them to fast, pray, and do penance for fifteen days. But this is an especial favour. Nothing is eaten or drunk during the whole of the time any one remains on the island, excepting bread and water, or meal and water. Bread and meal can both be purchased on the island ; but most of the pilgrims carry their scrip along with them.

I was considerably surprised when, upon my remarking, that with only one meal of bread and water in twenty-four hours, the pilgrims must become faint ; the woman with whom I was speaking, said, “ O, no ! the wine revives us, and gives us strength.”

“ Wine !” said I ; “ then you have wine : who pays for the wine ?”

“ Oh,” said she, “ it costs nothing ; but I see your honour doesn’t understand.” And then she explained to me the pleasant contrivance by which the pilgrims are regaled with wine, free of expense to them or anybody else. The water of the lake is boiled, and, being blessed, is called wine ; and it is given to the faint and greedy pilgrims as hot as they are able to swallow it. One of the women showed me her lips, covered with blisters, from the heat of the “ wine” she had drunk ; and I no longer doubted of the fillip it must give to one’s sensations, to have some half-boiling water poured into an empty stomach. I was assured the effect was wonderful ; and I well believed it.

The penances consist of constant prayer, fasting, and want of sleep. Before leaving the island, every pilgrim must remain twenty-four hours in *prison*, as they call it. Here they neither eat, nor drink, nor sleep. Not even the renovating “ wine” is allowed during these twenty-four hours : and means are also taken to prevent those *in prison* from sleeping. A person is appointed for this purpose ; but I was assured that the office of keeping each other awake is generally kindly performed by each other, from the best motives, I dare say ; for the whole efficacy of the penance is nullified by the indulgence of sleep.

The penance of praying around the saints’ beds is also practised. These are little circular stone walls, with stones and crosses inside, which are called saints’ beds ; and around these, on their knees, the pilgrims perform their “ stations,” repeating at certain spots a certain number of prayers. I inquired whether these revolutions were performed on the bare knees ; and the answer was, that this depended upon circumstances.

The sum exacted from the pilgrims, for all the comforts of St. Patrick’s Purgatory, including wine, amounts to 1s, 4 ½ *d.* ; of which 6 ½ *d.* is paid for the ferry. If, however, the penitent choose, there is nothing to prevent him from being generous ; and it is not improbable that his generosity may be acceptable. Every pilgrim, who is a candidate for the benefits of Loch Dergh, must bring with him a recommendation from the parish priest. I inquired particularly whether the priest encouraged the pilgrimage, or dissuaded from it. The answer was, that he sometimes enjoins it, but most commonly does not influence the applicant one way or another. It is evident that the country priest has no interest in recommending the pilgrimage, since the absence of his parishioner, and the expense of the pilgrimage, will diminish, rather than increase his revenue.

After waiting about an hour, during which the crowd of arriving pilgrims had greatly increased, the boat returned with another freight, and with the permission required. I immediately took my seat in the boat, and watched the extraordinary scene that ensued. The boat is capable of containing from forty to fifty persons ; but hundreds press forward to it. No one, however, is admitted without a ticket, previously obtained and paid for ; and a thick-set, blustering fellow, and one or two assistants, armed with sticks, stand at the side of the boat, pushing back, by main force, those who are not to enter ; and just as roughly thrusting forward those who are to be favoured. The pilgrims are stowed like so many brutes, in the bottom of the boat, from front to stern—the master shoving and

pushing them as he would a drove of pigs ; and I believe no one could contemplate the whole scene without being forcibly reminded of the paintings, which all are familiar with, of Charon and his cargo of damned. I was told, by the master of the boat, that strangers are generally ferried over in a separate boat ; and that I was particularly honoured by being permitted to go in the same boat with the pilgrims.

When the complement was completed, we shoved off ; and the water being rather agitated, we had the advantage of the pilgrims' prayers all the way. As we approached the island, though still at some distance from it, I could see the crowd in motion ; but as we approached nearer, the order had gone forth ; and all were at rest from their penances and prayers. The moment we reached the island, the pilgrims in the boat were driven on shore—most of them through the water ; and I waited a few minutes the arrived of a priest, under whose guidance I visited, and walked over the island. Every spot was crowded ; there was not a vacancy of a yard square over the whole surface of the island. All were seated on the ground, with books, and most of the women with rosaries in their hands : but it was evident that all devotions had been ordered to be suspended. No one either moved or spoke. I passed through the chapel, where four priests were seated, and the floor of which was entirely covered with pilgrims seated on it ; and I looked into the confessional, which was every bit as crowded : and after perambulating every part of the island, I may venture to say, that there could not have been fewer than two thousand persons upon a spot not three hundred yards long, and not half that breadth.

There used formerly to be a cave, on the present site of St. Patrick's chapel, which, in its day, was even more efficacious than its more modern substitute. This cave was shut up by the order of the Lords Justices, in the year 1630 ; but in the reign of James II., the spot was again resorted to, and a new cave was excavated, which in the year 1780 was again closed by order of the prior. The building now erected is the " prison, or chapel," used by the penitents.

The station at Loch Dergh begins on 1st June, and continues till 15th August. The day on which I visited Loch Dergh, twelve boat-loads of pilgrims passed to the island, with upwards of forty persons in each ; but supposing forty to be the average number, five hundred persons passed that day. The number of days, from the opening of the station to its conclusion, is seventy-five ; and supposing the number of persons passing daily, to be only one half of the number that passed on the 12th of August—viz. two hundred and fifty—the whole number of pilgrims visiting Loch Dergh would amount, during the season, to nearly nineteen thousand ; and from the inquiries I made, as well as from this mode of calculation, I have reason to think I am below, rather than above the mark.

I was not allowed a great while to inspect the island : the priest hurried me through, in order, no doubt, that the pilgrims and penitents might resume their devotions ; and had I not collected my information from other sources, I could have told the reader very little of what are the doings at St. Patrick's Purgatory.

It is impossible to witness a spectacle like this, without reflections being excited of rather a painful kind. I am not going to write a tirade against Popery, and Catholic superstitions ; but when I see thousands assembled at a place like this, far distant from their homes, I cannot but regret the loss of time so fruitlessly spent. Many had travelled from the remotest parts of Cork, Kerry, and Waterford ; and must have employed five or six weeks on the pilgrimage, at a season too, when if labour is to be had at all, it is to be had then. July is the period of the hay harvest ; and the loss of employment during that month, must have been a loss to many of at least 22*s.*. 6*d.*, to say nothing of the expenses of the journey. The Catholic bishop who, in the year 1830, advertised the holding of a station there, by his lordship in person. deserved to have had his ears pulled ; and Pope Benedict XIV., who preached a sermon reconunending this pilgrimage, would have been well punished by having the wine of Loch Dergh served up to his holiness, in place of his own *Lachrymæ Christi*. As for the poor infatuated and ignorant pilgrims, deluded by popes and bishops, they are sincere, I

doubt not, in their devotions : and although I am far from thinking that pilgrimage and penance are acceptable in the sight of God, I yet believe that the Deity cannot regard with aversion, any homage that is rendered in sincerity.

In returning from the island, the same scene was enacted as I had witnessed before. I returned with a fleet of pilgrims, whose term had expired ; and although it was then after`noon, another boat-load were still waiting their turn. I walked back to Pettigo, in company with several pilgrims, among whom was a priest, who told me he had come eighty miles to the station, and that he found himself much the better for the discipline. He told me, also, that whatever the weather might be, no one ever caught cold ; and that he never knew of any one suffering from sitting on the damp ground for days, in wet clothes, and with bare feet. I ought to mention, that many of the returning pilgrims were walking with us, and listening to the priest's exordium. There were three or four other priests performing their station on the island. I suppose it is thought necessary, that the station should occasionally be so honoured. When I reached Pettigo I invited my companion, the pilgrim priest, to take part of a leg of mutton which I had bespoken for dinner ; but he excused himself on the ground of his vow, which did not permit him to eat till next day. I only remained an hour at Pettigo, and then proceeded on my journey to Donegal.

A Journey Throughout Ireland During the Spring, Summer, and Autumn of 1834 (1838)

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