

A Tour in Ireland in 1672-4.

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Contributed with Notes, by JAMES BUCKLEY, Council Member.

THE tour here reprinted presents within short compass an exceedingly interesting description of the social life and manners, and religious usages, of the Irish peasantry in the seventeenth century. No previous writer can be said to have left us a closer observation, off the beaten tracks, of the country's ways ; and the tour is remarkable also as affording such ample evidence of the existence, more than two centuries ago, of so many customs that obtain at the present day. An occasional statement may perhaps be slightly exaggerated, but the description as a whole is free from that acerbity and pseudo-superiority so peculiar to the writings of English travellers in the country in Elizabethan times. The author is unknown, but the vital question of food on which he pondered long at the commencement of his account would seem to indicate the presence of an English palate. His allusions in that department shew that the oatcake continued to be, as it did for over half a century after, the staple diet of the people. The potato, although cultivated in the country, particularly in the South, had not yet attained a national popularity, and if referred to at all was ingloriously included in the generic term—" roots." [1] Fowls were remarkably cheap ; and so were eggs, which were procurable at the rate of twenty for a penny. Salmon was sold under three farthings per lb. ; and the prices of other provisions were equally low. These were verily " good old times." Very little mention is made of the costume of the people, most probably as it presented no very distinct features, since the famous Irish mantle—" fit house for an outlaw, a meet bed for a rebel, and an apt cloak for a thief"—had just then been abandoned. [2]

An original copy of the tour is now exceedingly scarce, and so far as can be ascertained it has not been reprinted hitherto. It was published in London, in 1674, under the title—" The Western Wonder : or, O' Brazeel an enchanted island discovered ; with a relation of two shipwracks in a dreadful sea-storm in that discovery. To which is added, A description of a place called Montecapernia, relating the nature of the people, their qualities, humours, fashions, religion, etc." The author dreamt of an enchanted island, and immediately communicated the nature of his dream to a friend, who—the account informs us—" did presently put great confidence in my dream, and readily consented not only to be assistant in this new discovery, but likewise to go himself in person, having at that time a vessel of his own of about thirty tons, ready fitted. No man could be fitter for this purpose than he and I, for we were both so indebted to the place wherein we were, that we only wanted a wind to sell the country. Having concluded on the design, we made no delays, but getting seamen a board, befitting our purpose, on October, the 9th, 1672, we set sail." The party were buffeted about at sea for several days. They beheld, at a distance, the enchanted island, but could not effect a landing. The description of the island somewhat resembles the Mandevillean account of it communicated in a letter from W. Hamilton, of Derry, to his friend in England, and printed in London in the year 1675, and afterwards reprinted in Hardiman's " Irish Minstrelsy" (London, 1831), and elsewhere. It is highly probably that since both accounts were published in succeeding years they were produced by the same imaginative pen. The vessel in which our author embarked was submerged, after tossing about for many days in a boisterous ocean, and the party took to the small boats. A few days afterwards they were

picked up by a trading vessel, which was in turn wrecked on a rock within musket shot of the shore. Here they remained until the tide receded, when they were enabled to land.

A skipper belonging to the second vessel conducted our author to a parson's house in a neighbouring village, where—the account relates—“ Having dried and refreshed ourselves, we fell into some discourse with the Parson and his wife ; and though they spake but little English yet they indifferently understood the sad Iliads of our misfortunes which they express by their tears, weeping bitterly at our relation, so that one would have thought they had suffered shipwrack, and not we. [3] What meat they had they did set before us ; and we fell to it so heartily as if we would have repaired all we lost before, by our long fasting, at one meal.

“ Their bread was broad oat-cakes baked on a flat stone, made of stuff much like that which the Welsh call Haver-meal ; but their beer is very strong, which they brew on purpose, as I imagine to verifie the proverb, ‘ Good Drink,, is Meat, Drink, and Cloth’ : for in the coldest season they will go bare-foot, and be clad very thin ; but they will be sure to keep their understandings warm, and line their insides well with their potent liquor.

“ The next day, the parson to express his kindness in a more liberal manner, desired us all to dine with him : we had but one dish for entertainment, and that so cram'd with such variety of God's creatures, that this dish seem'd to me to be the first chapter of Genesis ; there was such beef, mutton, goat's and kid's-flesh, bacon, roots, etc., and all so confounded, that the best palate could not read what he did eat, nor by his taste know and distinguish the several sorts of creatures. Though I was hungry enough, I did not like their thus working meat into a new chaos, and saucing the Creator's creatures out of the knowledge of mankind. But when I understood that this hodge-podge proceeded more from custom than from curiosity, and that this was one point of their husbandry to boyle all together to save charges, my former censure was somewhat mitigated. [4]

“ The Parson took so great a liking to me, that he would not be denied but that I should stay with him one month, to which, with much intreaty, I consented. The rest of the company took such courses as were most convenient for their present condition. In this time he brought me acquainted with many gentlemen of this countrey, one whereof so prevailed with me as to live with him two years : in which time I took these true ensuing observations of the countrey. If they are not so large and full as expected, let my small stay in that place make my apology.”

The Description of Montecapernia, with The Natures of The People, Their Qualities, Humours, Modes, Fashions and Religion.

MONTECAPERNIA is divided into two great parts, south and north ; and it may well admit of this division, since there is so great a difference in the manners and language of both places ; the south understanding the north, for the most part as little as the English do the Cornish.

The name Montecapernia, seems to be derived from the Latin Mons and Caper, as much as to say Montes Caprorum, Mountains of Goats ; and so it may properly have that appellation, since there are few Countries afford greater plenty of them ; whose nature is such, they will climb cragged and almost inaccessible high mountains, and dangerous precipices, with as much facility as a squirrel shall a tree. [5]

Montecapernia to the Southward is a countrey inricht with Nature's chiefest Treasures ; the fruitfulness of whose soil may vye with most places of the Universe.

Their hills for height are dreadful to the eye ; and although they seem almost inaccessible, yet are very profitable to the inhabitants, not only as to mines of Coal, Lead and Silver, contain'd within the bowels of these mountains, but also to the good common they afford to vast numbers of sheep, which are but small, yet very sweet mutton, whose fleece employs many hands in that countrey ; which plentifully supplies many more near adjacent, with good serviceable cloth, frize, flannel, etc.

Neither is the Northward of the Countrey so barren but that the land produceth what is necessary for the sustenance, profit and pleasure of the inhabitants. Their beasts in general are but small, yet such (as are for food) much more indulge the palate, than any flesh in other parts ; what are for labour are very serviceable, being full of mettle, exceeding hardy, and will carry burdens the greatness whereof would startle any man's belief.

The countrey is water'd by many excellent rivers and rivulets, which are furnished with great numbers of variety of fish ; one sort whereof I took special notice of having never seen the like before ; the natives call it a Mort, they are of all sizes, speckled, with red spots on the side, some whereof are as big as a salmon, and eat exactly like it.

Their seas round about supply them with all manner of shell-fish, and other sorts, the choicest which ever came to Neptune's table ; which they convey to other countries circum-jacent, and thereby make a very great advantage. [6]

Their marshes and rivers (of which they have plenty) are visited by multitudes of wild-fowl in the Winter-season ; their hills are stor'd with woodcock, grouse, heathcock, etc. Nor are they a little stored with red-deer, hares and rabbits.

Fish and flesh of all sorts are sold cheaper than can be imagin'd ; as a quarter of mutton for eight pence, an ell-long salmon [7] for ten pence, a pullet for a groat, and in some places (according to the season) twenty eggs a penny. I know not whether this cheapness may arise from the plenty of the aforesaid provision, or the scarcity of money.

The people in general are great admirers of their pedigree, and have got their genealogy so exactly by heart that though it be two hours work for them to repeat the names only from whence they are descended lineally, yet, will they not omit one word in half a dozen several repetitions ; from whence I gather they say them instead of their Pater noster, or their evening and their morning prayers.

The Gentry (for the most part) are extracted from very ancient families, who are adored by the commonalty ; and to give them their due are good natur'd gentlemen, exceeding free, and courteous to strangers, and extraordinary generous in their entertainments ; insomuch that I have seen in a gentleman's house of indifferent estate, at a moderate treat, twenty dishes, many of them trebly jointed, to recorapence the smallness of the meat.

Their want of wine is supply'd by most incomparable beer and ale, which runs as free as water on a visit ; [8] and if you do not drink as freely they think they have not made you welcome ; so that a man knows not how to take leave till he is unable to stir a foot.

They are very courteous in their speech and noble in their carriage, firm (where they take) and constant in their resolutions, splendid in their public ceremonies (of Shrievalty, and the like), couragious, stout, and great lovers of their prince and countrey, honourable in their inclinations, and resolute in their enterprizes. In short they are generally accomplish in most respects, and greatly given to that they call hospitality.

As I have thus characterize the good, so take the bad with it, according to my observation during my abode in this countrey : the purest wheat will have its chaff, and there is no wine but hath some lees.

Travelling into some places of no mean extent I thought myself to be at the fag-end of the world ; the land being so exceeding barren, and destitute of wood, that for ten or twenty miles together (cross the countrey) you could not see a bush to tye your horse to, till you have untrust a point ; and therefore you must either bridle your mouth to stay your horse, or trust to the tame nature and good conditions of the beast, who if he be inclin'd to cool his mouth with a tuft of grass, he may sooner find it in a feather bed ; but if the quickness of the air hath given him an appetite to eat, and a stomach to digest heath, moss, and scragged stones, he cannot want provision.

The people in these barren places have so little converse with travellers, and the paths are so untrodden, that a man must aim at the way by guess, or carry a compass with him : and yet he may easily mistake the most noted road, which, if he do, he had need have recourse to his devotion for his miraculous deliverance from riding twenty-four hours, and never the nearer his journies end—nay it may be not six miles distant from whence he stray'd—and in all his travels see nothing but a flock of geese, some scattered sheep, half a dozen ragged colts, and now and then a few crows flying over his head, unless by chance under the side of some hill (if near a common road) he discovers a smoke, which if he make towards and happily escape a bogg (of which the hills afford great plenty and very dangerous too) yet will it be difficult to discern the stately mansion whence the smoke arose, till his horse's feet be very near the roof—such is the natives' care in sheltering themselves within the walls of nature. [9] And upon this account I have heard several of them brag of the strength and strange scituation of their towns, one whereof I had described to me, which engaged my curiosity to see it, whence I took this observation.

It is scituated in a little vale, encompassed round with walls which are a mile thick, and more ; the entrance into the town is under water, and the steeple belonging to the town grows every year.

This place lies in the Norward of Montecapernia ; and though it be contemptible for its buildings, yet is often made the place for the General assize of that County, where the Justices of Oyer and Terminer sit : where, note that this countrey is governed by as wholesom laws as any other countrey. Now to unriddle the aforesaid description, the town is built in a hole encompassed with very great and high hills which meet in their tops almost at the entrance into Town, by which means there is a trough made over the passage from one hill to the other for a conveyance of a watry brook which otherwise would annoy the passage into town : under this trough the people travel, which is their going under water into town : As for the steeple, they have none, but the bell hangs in an yew-tree in the Churchyard ; and there lies the quibble that the steeple grows every year.

They boast of other strange things they have in their countrey, namely, a great green bridge two or three miles in length, on which (like that under which the river Anus runs in Spain) they can feed two or three hundred head of cattle. It seems there is a river in this countrey that runs some miles under ground, and disimbogues itself into the sea : the inhabitants report if a goose should be put into this river and she swim through this earthen bridge, she will come out with never a feather on her back—the cause to me is occult and hidden.

There is another place far within the land through which, at high water, the sea will lash up a considerable height, with a noise both horrible and hideous ; this is occasioned by the concav'd earth giving an inlet to the sea.

They talk of a well also that they have in which there is thirty steps to descend into it, in the stony side whereof there is the exact impression of a man which they say was Christ (by which you may gather the Montecapernians have heard of our Saviour) ; this impression was occasioned, as they say, when our Saviour descending this well to drink He lean'd against the wall, which was so tender-natured as to yield to His sides and limbs, lest its hardness should hurt any of them.

Though these things may seem incredible, yet I can assure this, that they will talk to one another about two miles distant, that is, one shall stand on the top of one high hill and the other upon the other, and though their tops are near, yet in the descending of one and ascending the other hill, reckoning the interval between, and it will not amount to less than two miles. This they will brag of too ; and to shew their wit they tell you pretty stories, as for example, that two fathers and two sons killed three hares, and each carried home one and no more : that is, there was grandfather, father and son. And to amuse you, will tell you that one of their countrey men caught a fox, a salmon and a pheasant at one draught in a net : that is, the net was laid for the pheasant in a small wood near the sea side where was a wyer in which was a salmon, which the fox getting ran with it into the wood, and so into the net just as he was drawing for the pheasant, and so caught them all three.

The Montecapernian Cots are generally built on the side of a hill, not to be discerned till you just come upon them. The cottage is usually raised three feet from the eaves to the ground on the one side, and the other side hath a rock for a wall to save charges, in regard carriage is dear and money but scarce, especially to such who never see it but once in seven years, when out of pure devotion they go to the next market town in the season to receive the confirmation of their faith, by sipping of wine out of a silver cup, which the parson's wife sets all the year after for a grace on the cupboard, and frequently serves for a brandy-taster. If for nothing else but for their taking the sacrament you may know they are no heathens.

The hearth is placed in the middle of the house, and their fuel is made of earth and cow-dung [10] dryed in the sun. The smoke goes through no particular place, but breaks through every part between the rods or wattles of which they make their doors, sides, and roof of the house, [11] which commonly is no bigger than an overgrown pigstye, to which they have two doors, one always shut, on that side where the wind blows ; from whence I believe it is that they brag they have the quickest architects in all the world, because they can build a house in a day.

The houses seem to mourn for the sterility of the countrey, being hung all in black, occasioned by the smoke, and but look up, you may see the oyle of smoke naturally extracted beyond the art of chymistry, hanging on the rods, which if it chance to fall upon your cloaths, I'll warrant you sure marked for a black sheep, nor shall the art of man remove the stain. [12]

They delight not in variety of rooms, hating three stories as a zealot does the Triple-Crown : and that they may have all their family about them inclosed in one room, the good man and his wife have their bed raised up about half as high as the roof, which is the teaster to their bed, made of straw or rushes according to cold or warm weather. The sheets are the woman's smock, which (if she be a good housewife) shall contain her smaller children on one side and her husband on the other, when closed up. [13]

They get into this bed by a stone or two set by the side. The man and wife lie at one end, and what children they have (boys and girls) lie at the other, their feet meeting all together, higgledy-piggledy. The rest of the family they dispose of thus : a goat or an ewe they tye to the beds feet ; over their heads roost their cocks and hens, and now and then show the nature of their name, foul the foul faces of their master and dame ; this dung likewise serves instead of soap when they have occasion to wash, which is but seldom, having nothing besides their cloaths to wear, but a neck cloth and a flannel smock. [14]

Their general food is a thin oatcake which they bake upon a broad flat stone made hot, a little sheeps-milk cheese, or goats milk, boyl'd leeks and some roots ; but seldom eat flesh, or drink strong beer, but at fairs and public solemnities : and then it is pity, for at any time small beer will set their heads afloat and their tongues into a perpetual motion ; talk of nothing but pedigrees, grow quarrelsome, fight with their own heels, and may be lose their stockings and shooes before they get home, which else might last them an age, in regard they never wear them but carry them on their backs, going barefoot till they come near a market town, where men and women alike, with an inch-pipe [15] filled with pigs-tail or mundungus tobacco, and a great turf of fire to light it, sit down on the ground and put on their stockings and shooes to go in, and at their return, at the same place pull them off again—being more afraid to scratch their shooes than cut their feet and toes, [16] whose skin is so hardened that men, women and children, in the midst of winter, go bare-foot on sharp stones, pieces of ice, edge or side, all alike to them. For which reason there are few shoemakers in the countrey, because commonly their shooes last them an age.

At other times their drink is either three parts water and a fourth milk, which they call Glastor, or a handful of crabs bruised and laid asoak in a bowl-full of running water for two or three hours. They have another sort of drink called whigg, which is a kind of sour whey. Likewise they have a drink called sicken-pen-son, cold water poured on the grains.

The people are naturally inclin'd to pride ; and to shew the antiquity of their family some of them derive themselves the immediate and next of kinde of Adam.

It is a thousand pities the people are so sloathful, being given to no manner of industry, husbandry or any other useful improvement, which partly occasions the barrenness of the countrey so much to appear, that otherwise by active spirits might easily evince the contrary : for though they have many hills, mountains and boggs, yet have they matchless rich vallies.

It may be conjectured their sloathfulness may in part be occasioned by their ignorance ; some of the indifferent sort being brought up to read and, by the pretence of gentility, scorning a trade, never heed the farther improvement of their fortunes, or understanding, till the father dyes and the elder brother possess the estate.

They are a people generally envious, especially of the rise of their neighbours ; naturally pragmatical and inquisitive after others affairs, and always blabbing and telling tales ; and so litigious that they are ready to go to law if they see their neighbour's horse put his head over their hedge, or his goose at their barn's door. [17]

The women are infected with the like quarrelsome humour. I have seen two women about some trivial matter fall together by the ears ; the men took each other's part, one neighbour seconded one and the next another till they had engaged two thirds of the town in the quarrel ; and none of them knew for what they fought, or how the fray began ; and to be revenged the more of one another they sent the next opportunity for process in battery, trespass, scandal, and I know not what : and then to law they went (for they love it above any-

thing). When they had spent their money, they were forced to put it to a reference, and then are at another charge in treating the arbitrators and their friends, who having feasted themselves, leave the business as they found it. And yet this great charge and trouble will not dissuade them from following these litigious courses, but are never at quiet but when they have some suit or other depending. Their lawyers take notice of the temper of the people, promote the differences in humouring their fancies, by which means they continually drain their pocket, and this is one great cause of their general poverty.

The commonalty are extremely awed by their superiors, in such sort, a tenant fears as much to speak against a Lord of the manor, or their next powerful neighbour, as wiser men would dread to speak treason against a prince under whose allegiance he lives and hath sworn to. And I have heard say that some of them will swear and forswear anything that may tend to the benefit of that landlord from whom he hath any dependance and think it no great crime.

Many notorious vices are among them, which they look upon to be things of another complexion ; and this I believe proceeds from their ignorance in religion; and that ignorance is occasioned by their superiors, who in these latter years have ingrosted to themselves all churchlands and allowance for the clergy. In several places it is so small that six such portions will scarcely keep a single man alive.

I knew one that had to the value of but eighteen shillings money per annum to officiate in Divine Service on the Sabbath day ; and therefore all the rest of the week he was forced to thatch, thresh, or wrought other ways for three pence a day.

The next thing we shall treat of is the particular parts of worship in their religion.

And first for Baptism, they generally do carry the child to the church as soon as born, if the church be near, where at the font the child is named by the godfathers and godmothers with a short ceremony ; all which Christian names, with the parents, are conjoyned, which if wrote at length, would blot more paper than the titles of the Grand Seignior.

The women are of a very strong constitution, the middling sort hardly keeping their beds three days at a lying-in ; and the fourth day will give no quarter to the groaning ale, fight the fifth, with the mark of the Lord of Northumberland's Arms under the Callicoe Hood which they wear for a kerchief.

Their marriages are made like bargains of old, like a pig in a poke unseen ; for the parents meet over a cup of nappy ale, where making some bargain for wheat, oats, or any other necessary thing they want, at last strike up a match between their son and daughter : [18] this serves instead of wooing, by which means the first meeting is seldom till the man comes to fetch the woman to church, attended with a rabble of all the relations, who must out of pure love not be sober that whole week, and then the next Sunday attend them to church again ; and there ends the ceremony.

They have no scruples in their marriages (as I could hear of) for the nearest of kin often intermarries with the other, one man frequently marrying two sisters, etc.

Their burials retain something of the relicts of Popish ceremony : for next night after the decease of the person, every friend, neighbour and relation comes to his house, and brings each a candle, and a gun of ale, where this jovial crew light up their lights, making a good fire, and then drink remembrances of the dead, till some of them lose their own, and for want of feet stand in need as much of bearers home, as the corpse to the grave. [19]

When the time comes to carry it out, which is within three or four days after the decease of the person, the priest in his surplice walks before the guests, round the corps, all confusedly, and the corps in the middle : being near the church, the men put off their hats, and then men and women set up together such a hideous cry that I can resemble it to nothing more proper than to that drowning men make when the ship is sinking. This they continue till they, come to the church where the priest in his own language reads a little service.

And here observe the policy of the priest : for having no certain fee allowed for burials, but by custom receives the free-will offering of the next of kin and friends to the deceased ; he will be sure, for fear he lose any of the guests, to stop in the midst of the service, and leaving his book open, stands with his face directly against the corps, by which dumb signs, the people knowing his mind, they make their offering. The first of kin goes to the Communion table and throws down his benevolence, perhaps a six pence, if he be a brother, or so near a relation. The rest by pence, or two pence, do so increase the parson's stock that it may amount to three or four shillings. After this he goes on merrily with the remaining part of the divine service ; and having finisht it, away to the ale-house, where he is sure to have his charge born for that day. [20]

Another strange passage they have at their burials, which I had almost omitted ; that is, they first give wheaten loaves to the poor, and as the corps stands at the door on a bier, the next of kin to the deceased taketh a new wooden bowl (never used) filled with the best liquor they have, and half a dozen wheaten loaves, with a good piece of cheese, and gives it to cross the corps to any whom he fancier to be the poorest beggar ; who receives the same, and immediately drinks the liquor, with a blessing to the soul departed. Desiring to be satisfied concerning the meaning of that strange ceremony they answered, that the souls of the deceased in their rambles in the Elizium do meet with a sweet-tasting pleasant fountain, of which each soul doth drink his bowl ; and if that ceremony were not performed at the burial of the deceased, they think that soul would want those necessaries in its supposed ramble thither.

Their Sunday is the most leisure-day they have, on which they use all manner of sport ; in every field a fiddle, and the lasses footing it till they are all of a foam, and grow infinitely proud with the blear-eye of affection her sweet-heart casts on her feet as she dances to a tune, or no tune, play'd on an instrument that makes a worsen noise than a key upon a gridiron.

Their greatest zeal is in keeping sacred some old sayings of their great grandsires, and preserving sacred some old relict of their grandmothers ; in both of which they are so strict, that for the first if they hear one whistle in the night, they are afraid, and will avoid you, because, say they, our ancestors told us that such as whistle in the night convers'd with the Devil and call those spirits in the air together by such sound to confer with them. [21]

The relicts of their grandmothers are as severe, for if she leave but an old chair, a wooden spoon, or any other trifle to them, they will preserve it sacred, fearing to prejudice it in the least ; should any such thing accidentally happen, they would absolutely conclude it did presage some harm ensuing.

They are great lovers of women, especially such of their own country ; and so unsensible of the guilt, that they glory in the crime, and brag of their spurious issue.

A gentleman of good note, whom I knew, had so many that he knew them not when he saw them : several strange women, whom he knew not, taking notice of this advantage, did frequently send their children to him, who to be rid of them quickly, gave them his formal

blessing with some small piece of money.

More might be said in *laudem & vituperium*, in the praise and dispraise of Montecapernia ; but my stay being there but a very little, I wanted both information and further observation.

FINIS.

- [1] For an interesting account of the potato, see paper by Sir W. R. Wilde, entitled “ An Inquiry into the time of the introduction and the general use of the potato in Ireland, and its various failures since that period,” in the Proceedings Royal Irish Academy for 1856.
- [2] The Rev. Dr. John Lynch —“ Gratianus Lucius”—who wrote “ Cambrensis Eversus,” some fifteen years before the above “ Tour” was undertaken, has much interesting information on ancient Irish dress in the thirteenth chapter of that learned work. The entire work has been edited for the Celtic Society by the Rev. Matthew Kelly, Dublin, 1850.
- [3] Shakspeare, who lived in the same century as our tourist, somewhat appropriately expresses the feelings of the audience :
- “ Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows,
Which shew like grief itself, but is not so.”
- King Richard II., act it, scene ii.
- [4] The dish referred to was no other than the well-known Irish stew—a dish of great antiquity and one that looms largely in ancient Irish saga. Apropos of it, the following story is related of Toole, the celebrated actor. Impatient with hunger, he asked a cynical Irish waiter at a restaurant again and again, “ is that Irish stew coming ?” till he was at last silenced by the answer, “ It’s comin’, and maybe it’ll be no great things when it comes.” He was right. When it came, Toole, finding a button in it, called out, “ Waiter! Look here ! What do you think I’ve found in this stew ?” “ Mate, maybe,” sneered the cynical waiter. “ A button ! I found that button in it !” “Ah then now, an’ what did ye expect to find—a gowld watch and chain ?”
- [5] “ At the present day numerous flocks of goats are seen wandering over the country, and that such was the case within the memory of our great grand-fathers is ascertained beyond a doubt. But when were they imported into Ireland? That is a mystery.—“ Cambrensis
- [6] The following excerpt from a manuscript in the British Museum (Lansdowne, 242), entitled, “ The Name, Climate, Dimentions, Division, Air, Soyl, Commodities, Money, and Buildings of Ireland, and written about the year 1693, is confirmatory of the writer’s remarks as to the abundance of fish captured on the Irish coast. “ Munster: This Province is called in Irish, Mawn, in a more ordinary construction of speech Moon ; lyeth upon Southward to ye Virginnia Sea, Northward it frunteth part of Connought, the East is Neighbourd by Leinster, and the West is altogether washed with the ocean westward. The forme thereof is Quadrant, and in length extended from Baltimore Bay in her South unto ye Bay of Galloway in her North, is about 90 miles ; her broadest part from East to West, is from Waterford Haven to ffeiretar Haven, and containeth 100 miles. The whole circumference by following ye Promontories and Inlets are about 440 miles. The air milde and temperate, neither too chilly cold nor too scorchy hot. The soyl in some parts hilly, looking aloft with woody, wilde and solitary mountains, yet ye vallies below are garnished with corne flields and generally all both pleasant for sight and fertile for soyle. The general commodities of this Province are corne, cattle, wood, wool, and ffish. The last thereof it affords in every place, plenty and abundance of all sorts. But none so well known for the store of Herrings yt are taken there as is the Promontory Erought yt lyes between Bantree and Baltimore Bay, whereunto every year a great ffleet of Spanyards and Portugueese used to resort (even in ye midst of winter) to fish also for cods. It was in past times divided into many parts. But at this day it is distinguished into these countries only, viz., Lymmerick, Waterford,

Corke, and Typperary. And in those shires are comprehended (besides many safe stations and roads for shipping) twenty four towns of note and trading, sixty six castles of old erection, and including in ye whole eight hundred and two parishes.”

[7] The English ell is twenty-seven inches, the length of a man’s arm. A salmon of that length would scale about 14 lbs. Eversus.”

[8] In the tour of the French traveller, Boullaye le Gouz in Ireland, A.D. 1644, he observed that “their beer is very good, and the eau de vie, which they call Brandovin [Brandy], excellent. The butter, the beef, and the mutton, are better than in England.”

[9] Boullaye le Gouz has also left a short description of the different kinds of Irish dwellings, which is worth quoting. “ The towns are built in the English fashion, but the houses in the country are in this manner. Two stakes are fixed in the ground, across which is a transverse pole to support two rows of rafters on the two sides, which are covered with leaves and straw. The cabins are of another fashion. There are four walls the height of a man, supporting rafters over which they thatch with straw and leaves. They are without chimneys, and make the fire in the middle of the hut, which greatly incommodes those who are not fond of smoke. The castles or houses of the nobility consist of four walls extremely high, thatched with straw ; but to tell the truth, they are nothing but square towers without windows, or at least having such small apertures as to give no more light than there is in a prison. They have little furniture, and cover their rooms with rushes, of which they make their beds in summer, and of straw in winter. They put the rushes a foot deep on their floors, and on their windows, and many of them ornament the ceilings with branches.

See also “ The Irish Hudibras” (London, 1689), to the like effect.

A more interesting and comprehensive account than either of the foregoing appears in Campbell’s “ Philosophical Survey of the South of Ireland.” London, 1777, p. 145.

[10] This substitute for fuel is called borán, and is still used by cottagers.

[11] Carapbell (“ Phil. Survey,” p. 146) alludes to the smoky condition of these houses.

“ Sometimes,” he says, “ they have a hole in the roof to let out the smoke, and sometimes none. For to have a chimney would be a luxury too great for the generality. The consequence is a house full of smoke, at least in the upper region, where it floats in thick clouds, the lower part being pretty clear of it. To avoid the acrimony of which you are obliged to stoop down, and the poor man of the house immediately offers you a low stool, that you may be, what he calls, out of the smoke. And this is, probably, the only stool in the house ; for the children nestle round the fire almost naked, with their toes in the ashes. Even the women though not so naked, sit upon their hams in the same way. But in spite of their general adhesion to the ground, the old people are, for the most part, blear-eyed, with pale and sooty faces.”

[12] This unpleasant picture is presented in verse form in “ Hesperidesographia : or, a Description of the Western Isle,” by W. M., Dublin, 1724, thus :

In midst of house a mighty fire
Of black dry’d earth and swingeing blocks
Was made enough to roast an ox ;
From whence arose such clouds of smoke,
As either me or you wou’d choak :
But Gillo and his train inur’d
To smoak, the same with ease endur’d ;
For sitting low, on rushes spread,
The smoak still hover’d over head ;
And did more good than real harm,
Because it kept the long house warm,

And never made their heads to ake ;
 Therefore no chimney he wou'd make.
 And thus for smoak, altho' 'twa' dear,
 He paid four shillings every year ;
 And tho' his wife no muslin wore,
 Nor silk, she was all spotted o'er
 With new made ermin which did fall
 From roof of house and side of wall
 Which was with cow-dung plaister'd round,
 With which the house did still abound.
 Yet not so clobe but that the smoak,
 Being long confin'd, through crannies broke,
 And through the soft and f—n pores
 And through the windows and the doors
 Through which the wind so fast did blow
 That for his life no man could know
 Whether of both with lesser pain
 The smoak or wind he could sustain.
 And when the scorching fire burnt clear,
 The rowling smoak did disappear,
 And vanish into air that you
 Each object could distinctly view.”

This Hudibrastic piece of scurrility was written by an old pedagogue named Moffatt, who resided in Killala, Co. Mayo ; and, although a most inferior composition is evidence of a strange literary taste that prevailed in the first half of the eighteenth century, since it ran into several editions.

- [13] Otway in “ Sketches in Erris and Tyrawly,” Dublin 1841 p. 32, describes the sleeping arrangements in these remote districts at the commencement of the last century. “ The floor is thickly strewed with fresh rushes, and stripping themselves entirely, the whole family lie down at once and together, covering themselves with blankets, if they have them, if not, with their day clothing, but they lie down decently, and in order ; the eldest daughter next the wall farthest from the door, then all the sisters, according to their ages ; next the mother, father, and sons in succession, and then the strangers, whether the travelling pedlar, or tailor or beggar ; thus the strangers are kept aloof from the female part of the family, and if there be an apparent community, there is great propriety of conduct.” This is what was called sleeping in “ Stradogue.”
- [14] There is an illustrated page prefixed to the original, in which six incidents in the voyage and the subsequent travels in the country are separately depicted. This and the preceding paragraph are rather vividly treated.
- [15] This is an early reference to the short-stemmed pipe, the victim of the vulgar caricaturists peculiar to the first half of the last century.
- [16] I once knew a half-witted rustic who was always equipped with a very substantial pair of heavily-nailed boots. These he mostly carried on his back to save what he considered needless wear and tear. In this manner he was one day walking on the high road and knocked one of his toes against a stone. “ How fortunate,” he joyfully exclaimed, “ I had not my boots on as there would surely be a nail out !”

In the description of the Irish woman in "The Irish Hudibras," p. 61, the following lines bearing on this subject occur :

“ Her stockins twisted like an harslet
 She wore about her neck for bracelet ;

And as Antipodes, the jade,
Carry'd her brogues upon her head :
Their naked trunks they thus expose,
To save th' expense of shooes and hose."

[17] The following amusing story is related by W. H. Maxwell in his "Wild Sports of the West of Ireland" (Lon., 1832). It is asserted, but with what truth I cannot pretend to state, that the inhabitants of [the Island of] Inniskea are prone to litigation, and a curious legend of a lawsuit is told upon the main, illustrative of this their quarrelsome disposition. A century ago, two persons were remarkable here for superior opulence, and had become the envy and wonder of their poorer neighbours. Their wealth consisted of a flock of sheep, when, unfortunately, some trifling dispute occurring between them, a dissolution of partnership was agreed upon. To divide the flock one would suppose, would not be difficult, and they proceeded to partition the flock accordingly. They possessed one hundred and one sheep ; fifty fell to each proprietor, but the odd one—how was it to be disposed of ? Neither would part with his moiety to the other, and after a long and angry negotiation, the animal was left in common property between them. Although the season had not come round when sheep are usually shorn, one of the proprietors requiring wool for a pair of stockings, proposed that the fleece should be taken off. This was resisted by his co-partner, and the point was finally settled by shearing one side of the animal. Only a few days after, the sheep was found dead in a deep ditch : one party ascribed the accident to the cold feelings of the animal having urged him to seek a shelter in the fatal trench ; while the other contended that the wool remaining upon one side had caused the wether to lose its equilibrium, and that thus the melancholy catastrophe was occasioned. The parties went to law directly, and the expenses of the suit actually devoured the produce of the entire flock, and reduced both to a state of utter beggary. Their descendants are pointed out to this day as being the poorest of the community, and litigants are frequently warned to avoid the fate of Malley and Malone."

Much may be, and undoubtedly was, said on both sides, but the judgment has not been handed down. The law of England applicable to such cases is dependent altogether on the evidence adduced as to the facts. An Irish brehon applying his rigid code would have felt very confident of his decision in such a case. The Brehon Law Code provided for such like extraordinary causes of action—see "The Book of Aicill," p. 375.

[18] A lapse of two centuries has effected no apparent change in the matrimonial preliminaries in the South of Ireland

[19] T. C. Croker's "Keen of the South of Ireland," Lon., 1844, p. viii.

[20] This disedifying practice, once very general, is still in vogue in a few Irish dioceses ; and the clergy frequently collect from £60, to double that amount, at a burial !

[21] Whistling at night is still considered very unproper and unlucky in the South.

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