

The Travellers' Way

The Letters of "Norah" in her Tour Through Ireland

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Sligo's Good Landlords—The Police and Their Duties—A Doubtful Compliment—An Amazon.

It has been something wonderful to me that when I left Leitrim, I seemed to have left all bad landlords behind me. Every one I came in contact with in Sligo, rich or poor, had something to say about a good landlord. Some were thoughtfully kind and considerate, of which they gave me numerous instances ; others if the kind actions were unknown, positively unkind ones were unknown also, so their portraits came out in neutral tints. I conversed with high Tories and admirers of the Land League, but heard only praise of Sligo's lords of the soil. I thought I should leave Sligo, believing it an exceptional place, but just before I left I heard two persons speak of one bad landlord of Sligo.

On May 18th I left the green valleys of Sligo behind and took passage on the long car for Ballina. I found that the long car was to be shared with a contingent of police, who were returning to their several stations after lawfully prowling round the country protecting bailiffs and process-servers in their unpopular work. I cannot believe that these quiet, repressed conservators of the peace can possibly feel proud of their duties. These duties must often—and very often—be repugnant to the heart of any man who has a heart, and I suppose the majority of them have hearts behind their trim jackets. I liked to look at these men, they are so trim, clean, self-respectful. They have also a well-fed appearance, which is comfortable to notice after looking at the hungry-looking, tattered people, from whom they protect the bailiffs.

We passed Balasodare—I did not stop, for I felt that it was better to get this disagreeable journey over at once.

We stopped at a place called Dromore west, to change horses and to change cars. We had dropped the police, a few at a time, as we came along, so that now the car was not by any means crowded. We all stood on the road while the change of horses was being made. It was slow work, and I went into a shop near to ask for a glass of water. The mistress of the shop enquired if I would take milk. I assented, and was served with a brimming tumbler of excellent milk. Payment was refused, and as I turned to leave, I was favored with a subdued groan from the women assembled in the shop. Evidently they thought I was some tyrant who required the protection of the police. It would not flatter me—not much—to be taken for some landholders here.

When my police fellow-voyagers were dropped at their comfortable white barracks here and there, and only one was left, we fell into conversation to beguile the time. He had been at one time on duty in Donegal and knew how matters were there, from his point of view, better than I did. We spoke of Captain Dopping, and his opinion of him was if anything lower than mine. He expressed great thankfulness that guarding the Captain had never been his duty. Whether he disliked it from moral causes, or for fear of intercepting in his own person a stray bullet intended for the gallant captain, he did not say.

Arrived at Ballina after a long, tiresome journey, yet like everything else in this world it had its compensations. Ballina is a kind of seaport town, in the Rip Van Winkle way. An inlet from Killala Bay called the Moy runs up to the town. There is no stir on the water, no perceptible merchandise on the quay. One dull steamboat painted black, in mourning for the traffic and bustle of life that ought to be there, slides out on its way to Liverpool and creeps back again cannily. Unless you see this steamboat I can testify that you might put up quite a while at Ballina and never hear its existence mentioned, so it cannot be of much account. The streets are thronged with barefoot women and ragged lads with their threepenny loads of turf. The patient ass, with his straw harness and creels, is the prevailing beast of burden everywhere I have travelled since I entered Enniskillen with the exception of Sligo.

Sligo town, like Belfast in a lesser degree, has the appearance of having something to do and of paying the people something who do it. The traders who come to Ballina market seem to trade in a small way as at Manor Hamilton. Still, the town is handsome and clean, a large part of the population prosperous-looking, in an easy going-way, the ladies fine-looking and well dressed. One wonders what supports all this, for the business of the town seems of little account.

Spent a Sunday here and after church became aware that the too, too celebrated Miss Gardiner, with her friend Miss Pringle, had arrived at the hotel on their way to Dublin, on evictions bent. The police had marched out in the evening to her place to protect her in. I was eager to see this lady, who enjoys a world-wide fame, so sent her my card requesting an interview, which she declined. I caught a glimpse of her in the hall as she passed out with her friend and guard. She is a very stout, loud-voiced lady, not pretty. The bulge made by the pistols she carries was quite noticeable. "Arrah, why do you want to see either of them," said a maiden to me. "Sure they both of thim drink like dragons"—dragoons she meant, I suppose—"an' swear like troopers, an' fight like cats." This was a queer bit of news to me. I did not take any notice of it at that time ; but, dear me, it is as common news as the paving stones on the street.

Miss Gardiner is almost constantly at law with her tenants, lives in a state of siege, maintains, at the cost of the country, an armed body guard, and is doing her very best to embroil the country in her efforts to clear the tenants off her property. At the Ballycastle petty sessions a woman, summoned by this lady for overholding, as they call it, appeared by her son and pleaded that she had been illegally evicted. Miss Gardiner told them they might do what they liked, but she must get her house. Now this house never cost Miss Gardiner a farthing for repairs nor for erection, and it is all the house the wretched creatures have, and, of course, they hold to it as long as they are able. The priest attempted to put in a word for the woman, and was unmercifully snubbed by the bench. In Miss Gardiner's next case, the bench decided that the service was illegal. Miss Gardiner then called out, "I now demand possession of you in the presence of the court." The bench would not accept this notice as legal.

She had a great many cases and gained them all but this one. This particular Sunday when I had the honor of seeing her she was bound for Dublin on eviction business.

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Killala—The Canadian Grant to The Famine Fund and What It Has Done—Ballysakeery—
Three Landlords—A Landlord's Interesting Statement.

I had the very great pleasure of a drive to the ancient town of Killala, accompanied by the wife of the Rev. Mr. Armstrong, who superintends the orphanage and the mission schools in

connection with the Presbyterian Church of Ballina. Killala is an old town with a gentle flavor of decay about it. It has a round tower in good preservation, and an ancient church. I was shown the point where the French landed at the stirring time of war and rebellion.

It makes my heart glad to hear in so many places of the benefit the Canadian grant has been to this suffering country. I heard with great pleasure of fishing boats along the coast named Montreal, Toronto and other Canadian names in affectionate remembrance of the Canadian dollars that paid for them. This grant has been a means of convincing the people that there is such a place as Canada. The peasant mind had a sort of belief that America consisted of two large towns, New York and Philadelphia. In one instance the Canadian paid nets arrived on Thursday ; they were in the water on Saturday, and many boats returned laden with mackerel. So great a capture had not been remembered for many years. In one locality where the nets given were value for less than £200, it was proved that the boats had brought in during four weeks over £1,200 worth of mackerel.

After we had taken a view of Killala we had a pleasant interview with the good minister at Ballysakeery. Here we received one of those welcomes that cheer the travellers' way and leave a warm remembrance behind. The famine pressed hard upon Mayo. Many respectable people were obliged to accept relief in the form of necessary food, seed potatoes and seed oats. It is a noticeable fact that here, as in Leitrim—that part at least of Leitrim in which I made investigations—the landlords in a body held back from giving any help to the starving people on their lands. Sir Roger Palmer gave potatoes to his tenants and sold them meal at the lowest possible figure, thus saving them from having the millstone of Gombeen tied round their neck. Sir Charles Gore, a resident landlord, has the name of generosity at this time of want, and justice at all times, which is better to be chosen than great riches. The Earl of Arran, who has drawn a large income, he and his ancestors, from this part of Mayo for which they paid nothing, not only gave nothing but gave no reply whatever to letters asking for help.

The land belonging to the Earl of Arran here—I cannot undertake to write the name of the locality by the sound—was a common waste and was let by the Earl at two shillings and sixpence per acre to Presbyterian tenants, who came here from the North I believe. Of course they had to reclaim, fence, drain, cultivate for years. They built dwellings and office houses, built their lives into the place. After they had spent the toil of years on improvement, their rents were raised to seven and sixpence per acre, five shillings at one rise ; then it was raised to ten shillings ; the next rise was to fifteen shillings and then to twenty. The land is not now able to bear more than fourteen shillings an acre rent and support the people who till it. These people have been paying a rack rent for years to this nobleman, the Earl of Arran, yet when starvation overtook them, he had neither helping hand nor feeling heart for them.

The distress of this last famine was so great in this corner of Mayo that people on holdings of thirty acres were starving—would have died but for the relief afforded. It takes some time—and more than one good harvest—for people who have got to starvation to recover themselves far enough to pay arrears of rent.

We visited the ruins of Moyne Abbey, which are in good preservation yet. One of the present lords of the soil had a part of it made habitable and lived there some time, but it is again unroofed and left to desolation. It has been a very extensive building, stretching over a great extent of land now cleared of ruins. What remains is still imposing.

We had a pleasant interview with the Rev. Mr. Nolan, the kind and patriotic priest of this neighborhood, and we returned to Ballina as gratified and as tired as children after a holiday excursion.

I was introduced at Ballina to a landlord, a fine, clever-looking man, with that particularly well-kept and well-fed appearance which is as characteristic of the upper classes in Ireland as a hunger-bitten, hunted look is characteristic of the poor. I would not like to employ as strong language in speaking of the wrongs of the tenantry as this gentleman used to me. He is both landlord and agent. He condemned all the policy of the Government toward Ireland in no measured terms. Spoke of the emigration that is going on now, as well as the emigration that had taken place after the last famine, as men going out to be educated for and to watch for the time of retribution. Retribution for the accumulated wrongs which mis-government had heaped upon Ireland he looked upon as inevitable, as coming down the years slowly but surely to the place of meeting and of paying to the uttermost farthing. Well, now, these are queer sentiments for a landlord to hold and to utter publicly. He acknowledged freely that a great part—a very great part—of the excessive rents extorted on pain of eviction, the eviction taking place when the unfortunate fell behind, were really premiums paid on their own labor. Furthermore, he acknowledged that he himself had raised the tenants' rents on the estates for which he was agent, compelling them to pay smartly for the work of their own hands. He spoke highly of the people as a whole, of their patience, their kindness to one another, and their piety. He spoke of the case of one man, a peasant, who could only speak broken English, who came under his notice by coming to him to sell rye-grass to make up his rent. This man with the imperfect English was a tenant of the gentleman's brother. He held three acres, two roods of land in one place at a rent of £7 5s, where his house stood ; one acre, at £1 4s. Of course he or his ancestors built the house. His poor rate and county cess is 16s, or \$46.25 yearly for four acres, two roods of land. If they got it for nothing they could not live on it, say some. The best manure that can be put upon land is to salt it well with rent, say Mr. Tottenham and Mr. Corscadden. Well, this man since the famine, has no stock but one ass and a few hens. He cut and saved his rye-grass himself, sold it for £3. 10s, sold his oats for £3 4s 6d ; had nothing more to sell ; had remaining for his wife and two little ones a little meal and potatoes. He is a year and a half behind in his rent, and likely, after all his toil and struggle, to be set on the roadside with the rest. He has no bog near, there is none nearer than over five miles, except some belonging to Miss Gardiner. Of course that mild and sober spinster that will not oblige her own tenants has nothing in the way of favor for outsiders. It took him twelve days last year to make sufficient turf to keep the hearth warm. He went to the bog in the morning on his breakfast of dry stirabout, with a bit of cold stirabout in his pocket to keep off the hungry grass, as the peasant calls famished pains, and walked home to his dry stirabout at night, having walked going and coming eleven Irish miles over and above his day's work. He drew home seventy ass loads of turf at the rate of two loads per day—twenty-two Irish miles of a walk. Let Christians imagine this man at his toil in his thin clothing, poor diet and bed of straw with scanty coverlet, toiling early and late to pay an unjust rent. Often after his hard day's work he has gone out at night with the fishers and toiled all night in hopes of adding something to his scanty scores. Said the landlord, "The vilest criminal could not have a harder life than this God-fearing, uncomplaining peasant. What I tell you I drew from him, for he made no complaint." "You have a hard life of it, my man," said the landlord to him. He was not his tenant. "Well, sir, sure God is good and knows best," was the man's answer.

I was very much astonished at this gentleman's narrative and his other admissions, and I ventured to enquire for my own satisfaction had he made restitution to the tenants : "Have you, sir, restored what you have robbed ?" I did not suggest the four-fold which is the rule of that Book which we acknowledge as a guide and law-giver. "I am doing so," he replied, and

he handed me a printed address to the tenants, offering twenty-five percent reduction on arrears, if paid within a certain time. Now, I was very much interested in this gentleman and in his opinions, but I could not bring myself to agree with him that this was restitution. However, I state the matter and leave it to that enlightened jury, the readers of the Witness, "too large to pack at any rate," and let them give their decision. I think myself that a little of the Sermon on the Mount, applied conscientiously, would be good for those who hold the happiness of Ireland in their hands. When justice becomes loud-voiced and likely to pass into vengeance, they talk of giving a little as charity.

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The Story of An Eviction.

On the 20th of May I received a whisper of an eviction that was to occur up in the neighborhood of the Ox Mountains. Great opposition was expected, and therefore a large force of police was to be there. I procured a car, and in company with the local editor went to see. The landlord of this property is an absentee; the agent—a Mr. Irwin—lived in a pleasant residence which we passed on our way. We noticed that it was sheepshearing time at his place, and many sheep were in the act of losing their winter covering.

After we left Ballina behind, and followed in the wake of the police for some time, we seemed to have got into the "stony streak." Such land! Small fields—pocket handkerchiefs of fields—the stones gathered off them built into perfect ramparts around them! I enquired of one gentleman what was the rent exacted for this land so weighted down with stones—for in addition to the high, broad fences surrounding the little fields some of them had cairns of stones built up in the middle of them. He said thirty shillings an acre (\$7.50); asked another who said fifteen (\$5.75). I fancy one would need to see the office receipts to know correctly.

There is little cultivation in this part of the country. Hopeless-looking ragged men, and barefoot ragged women, were at work in the fields; little ragged children peeped from the wretched houses at the police as they passed. And indeed they were a fine squad of broad-shouldered, good-looking men, heavily armed, marching along, square and soldier-like, with a long, swinging step that goes over the ground quickly.

We followed them up a stone-fenced lane just wide enough for the car to pass. As we went along, men working at building a stone wall, looked at the procession with a cowed frightened look. Our carman gave them the "God save you" in Irish, and in answering they turned on us surely the weariest faces that ever sat on mortal man. The lane becoming narrower, we soon had to leave the car and follow the police on foot through a pasture sprinkled with daisies.

Suddenly we saw the police scatter, sit down on the ditch and light their pipes, throw themselves on the grass, group themselves in two's and three's here and there. The end of the journey was reached.

We looked round for the wild men of Mayo from whom the bailiff, sub-sheriff, and agent were to be protected, who were, I was told, to shed rivers of blood that day. They were conspicuous by their absence. There were three or four dejected-looking men standing humbly a bit off, three women sitting among the bushes up the slope, that was all. The house where the eviction was to be held was a miserable hovel, whose roof did not amount to much, sitting among untilled fields, with a small dung heap before the door. It was shut up, silent and deserted.

The bailiff, a gentleman who, if ever he is accused of crime, will not find his face plead for him much, broke open the door and began to throw out the furniture on the heap before the door. Here are the items : One iron pot, one rusty tin pail, two delf bowls,—I noticed them particularly for they rolled down the dungheap on the side where I stood,—one rheumatic chest, one rickety table, one armful of disreputable straw, and one ragged coverlet This was supposed to be the bed, for I saw no bedstead ; there was no chair, stool, or seat of any kind. The sub-sheriff with the bailiffs assistance fastened the door with a padlock. He handed the agent a tuft of grass as giving him possession, and the eviction was over.

The agent—a large featured man—seemed undecided as to whether he would view the transaction in a humorous light or as a scene where he was chief sufferer. He came forward and offered some rambling remarks addressed to nobody in particular. He drew our attention to the condition of the roof which needed renewing, to the fields that were uncropped. This was certainly shiftless, but when he mentioned that the man had gone to England “ in the scarcity” to look for work, and was lying sick in an English hospital, we did not see how he could help it. He told us how bad the man was ; how he pitied his wife, who was, he said, worse than himself. She was not present being from home when her poor furniture was pitched out. He lamented over the fact that this man had sent him nothing of his wages, while another man had sent him as much as thirty pounds. He then went into details of these evicted tenant’s married life ; how his wife and he lived, and how they agreed ; and rambled off into general philosophic remarks rather disagreeable and nasty.

No one seemed to pay any attention, although he looked from one to another for an answering smile of appreciation to his funny attempts to justify himself and amuse his hearers. Some one asked him how much rent was due ; he said ten or eleven years. Two years were due, as we found by the law papers on returning to Ballina. He then made an attack on the poor men standing there, asking why they were not at home working, and telling them what they should be doing. While he lectured these men in a joking voice, he turned his eye from one to another of those present as if he were seeking for applause.

These men, not heeding the agent, were presenting a petition to the sub-sheriff. I drew near to learn what it was. They were thin, listless looking witted men. One could not help wondering when they had last eaten a square meal. Half-starved in look, wretched in clothing, they stood like criminals awaiting sentence, with dreadfully eager eyes and parched lips that would not draw together over their teeth, before the plump rosy sub-sheriff. They asked for some meal on credit, which the sub-sheriff refused. I asked them if they owed any rent. No, they did not owe a penny of rent, they said. Remember there was only one harvest between them and the famine year. They had also put in the crops in their little holdings, they said, “ but as God lives we have neither bite nor sup to keep us till harvest time.” The sub-sheriff asked why they did not go to a certain dealer. They said the terms were so hard that they could never pay him. “ How much would keep you till the crops come in,” he asked. Two hundred of Indian meal for each, they said. Finally he promised them one hundred each on credit, even if he had to pay it out of his own pocket. “ That is what you will have to do,” said the agent.

We left and drove home. We saw the police, hot and tired, march past to their barracks after our return. These men had a long march, loaded down with arms to protect the bailiff, the stalwart agent, the rosy sub-sheriff from a crowd of five hunger-bitten peaceable men and three ragged women. The whole crowd might have been put to flight by any one of the three with one hand tied behind him.

I forgot to mention that the agent offered to one of the women there all the tenant's poor things that were thrown out, which was an honest and honorable proceeding on his part, and very generous.

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A Severe Criticism Justified—Process Serving By The Aid of The Police—The White Horse of Mayo—Peasant Proprietorship.

I am glad to see by the papers that the state of the workhouse at Manor Hamilton has been censured by the doctors, and deliberated about at a meeting of guardians. It is certainly the worst conducted workhouse I have seen as yet in Ireland, and it says with a loud voice, woe to the poor who enter here. It was told me on this twenty-seventh day of May that if I really wanted to see a disturbance a serious collision was apprehended between the constabulary and the people, at some distance from Ballina. I have been led to distrust the accounts of disturbances that appear in the papers, or at least to admit them with caution. I was assured that now at least I should see the wild men of Mayo, for they had assaulted the process server and stripped him of his clothing, taking his processes from him, some days before, and they would be out in thousands this day to oppose the serving of the processes.

Got a car, as travelling companion the local editor, and driven by a knowledgeable man, followed in the wake of the police, seventy of them, toward the scene of the disturbance to be. The police had one hour the start of us. It was a dim day of clouds and watery blinks of sunshine. As we drove along all historical spots were pointed out to me, being a stranger, with great politeness. A place on the road where the French had surged up from Killala and met and fought with the English, was pointed out to me. "Here they were defeated, thim French."

We passed the place where lived from colthood to glory the celebrated white horse of Mayo, the "Girraun Bawn." This horse, a racer, "bate" all Ireland in his day, and was ridden without a saddle or bridle. Mayo was very proud of this racing steed, so much so that when horses were seized and impounded for the county cess, a farmer who had received his mare back again, considering that it would be a disgrace if the king of horses were left in the pound, returned to Castle Connor to the pound, left his own horse there and released "Rie Girraun."

This celebrated horse was stolen it appears. After some time a troop of dragoons were quartered in Mayo, whose commanding officer rode a horse suspiciously like "Rie Girraun." The servant man who had ridden and cared for the white horse of Mayo recognized the horse and drew inconveniently near to the soldiers on parade to make sure whether it was "Rie Girraun" or not. The officer, annoyed at the man intruding where he was not wanted, asked him what business he had there. He said, "The horse your honor rides was stolen from this place, and I was looking at him to be sure. He is the famous white horse of Mayo." He was asked to prove it, which he undertook to do if the officer would alight, which he did. The peasant, then, hidden behind a stone ditch, called to the horse in Irish, asking him if he would have a glass of whiskey. The horse had been accustomed to get this when he had won a race, and knew the taste of poteen. He pricked up his ears and galloped round, looking for the voice. On the words being repeated two or three times, he vaulted over the stone wall and came to his old friend hidden behind. The officer would not part with the horse, but he paid liberally for him—so it seems the white horse of Mayo ended his days in the service of royalty.

The grandson of the possessor of the white horse was the other day fined £6 for possessing poteen, and was unable to pay it.

Listening to these stories we came up with the police, who had alighted from their cars and were going through their exercise preliminary to a march. We made our way through the cars, our driver chaffing a little with the drivers of the other cars. Just opposite where the police left the cars was the most utterly wretched house that I had yet seen. A large family of ragged people gathered at the door, looking to be in anything but fighting trim. We drove slowly, the police marched quickly, until we saw them take to the fields, when we alighted per force and followed them.

A slim, fair-haired woman, with her arms bare and her feet and legs in the same classic condition under her short dilapidated skirts, began to make some eloquent remarks. If there had been a thousand or two like her I do think the seventy police would have had hard work to protect the bailiff. One of our company, a gentleman, remarked to her that she had a fine arm of her own. "Troth, sir," said she, "If I was as well fed as yourself it's finer it would be." We agreed with this gentleman that if this woman was fed and clothed like other people she would certainly be a fine-looking person. She drew near to enquire if we were in any way connected with the police. Her enquiries were especially directed to myself. She was told that I was an American lady, and a few faces that scowled were smoothed into smiles immediately.

There were by this time four women and half a dozen boys present. No one spoke above their breath but our woman of bare arms. In answer to something addressed to her by our party, she said, "Sure they could not take a better time than seed time to droive us out of our senses. Sure God above has an eye and an ear for it. Look here," she said, throwing out her handsome bare arm, "look at the bare fields lying waste because the seed cannot be got to put in the ground ; they're cryin' up to God against it. The cratures here have not enough yellow male to keep the hunger off. If they had waited till harvest there would be a color of justice to it." This woman had all the talking, to herself, no one else had anything to say. She herself was not among those against whom the processes were served.

We saw the process server leave the ranks of the police and walk down to a wretched little cabin and return in a few moments. The order to march was given, and the police tramped along to the next house, a bit off the road. Two or three little children were in the field, apparently herding cattle. The least one said to his brother in an accent of terror, "Jimsey, Jimsey, the war is come at last."

Along the road, tramp, tramp, off the road through the bogs, every house called at seeming worse than the last. A rumor had been running along before us—ever before us—of an Amazonian army with pitchforks, tongs and the hooks used for drawing the sea weed ashore, armed and ready, some three hundred strong, waiting for the police. We never came up to this army or caught a sight of their rags. Crossing a field we were told of a merciful lady, a Mrs. Major Jones, who gave them seed potatoes and trusted them with meal when they had nothing to eat. As the police halted before some houses we heard the muttered exclamations of the few women near, "Eagh ! eagh ! oh. Lord, and them in need of charity !"

Well, we never came up with the army of women. The processes were not all served, for some of the houses were empty, and there was no one on whom to serve them ; we turned our steps, or our horses rather, homeward to Ballina, the boys calling out in compliment to America, "Three cheers for the noble lady" as we drove off.

The threatened rain came on and came down heavily and we got our share of it before we got under shelter. An elderly gentleman was introduced to me at Ballina who had had a very great opportunity of noticing the working of the law and the struggles of the people. He admitted to me that some might possibly have paid some rent before the agitation began, but kept it back hoping for a permanent reduction, and then when they had it by them had used it for living, and now had nothing to meet the rent with. He said, however, that the most part had not recovered from the effects of the scarcity sufficiently to be able to pay up arrears—or, indeed, to pay anything on arrears.

We conversed a little about peasant proprietorship. He instanced the case of two persons who had become owners of church land, one of eight acres, another of sixteen. He spoke of the prosperity that had crowned their labors ever since hope came to them and they had something to struggle for. He said they came now decently clad to church and market. He had been in their houses and noticed as much as two fitches of bacon hanging in the chimney. One of them owned a team of horses. A man with a team of horses on his farm is in a different position from a man with only an ass and creels. Absolutely, said he, the man has devoted a portion of his land to apple trees.

It was a touching thing to see the earnestness with which this man spoke of these great evidences of prosperity—horses to work the farm, two fitches of bacon and planting apple trees. In Mayo, in two instances, I have seen a corner left untilled in a field. As there was an ass in one, and a goat browsing in the other, I do not know but what it was the best thing they could do to leave them untilled.

I may as well mention that the wretched people on whom the processes were served lived in Sligo, and the landlords who were pursuing them, as it were between the hay and the grass, were Sligo landlords, of those whom I heard praised so highly in Sligo town. Round Ballina, as round Sligo, there are few tenants on the land near the town ; it has gone to grass and has cows instead of tenants. Sir Charles Gore's demesne and residence is very fine, and, as he seems to have a blessing with it, long may he enjoy his good things.

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The Land of Flames—A Relic with A History—Cattle *Vs.* Men.—The Meeting of Extremes
—Put Yourself In His Place.

Was invited by a friend to visit Rappa Castle to see a celebrated vessel which once belonged to Saint Tighernain, the saint who belongs more especially to the west and the clock which was removed from Moyne Abbey when it was dismantled. This vessel, belonging to the saint called Mias Tighernain—which I would freely translate as meaning Tighernain's own—has been used until of late years, when the clergy interposed and forbid it, for the discovery of stolen goods. Any one swearing falsely on the Mias Tighernain was sure to come to grief. People swearing falsely on the Bible have been known to escape visible consequences. Our car driver, a not very old man at all, told us he was present himself when a numerous household were brought together to be sworn on the Mias Tighernain for the discovery of a large sum of money which had been stolen. The thief was discovered but the money was not.

It is very pleasant to drive along through the fair but tenantless lands that surround Ballina. The county of Mayo is beautifully diversified by mountain and valley, wood and water, glen and stream. The tall hedges of white thorn in their bridal white perfume the air. Myriads of primroses smile at the passer-by from sunny banks. Small golden blossoms, like

whin blossoms, cluster thickly here and there, and the starry-eyed daisies, white and sweet with blushes edged, lift their modest faces to the sky. Even the bog waste is nodding all over with a cotton flower, white as a snowflake ; they call it *ceanabhan* in Irish, and the peasantry use it as a comparison when praising the white arms and bosoms of the Mayo maidens. Surely one might say this bright May morning with Tim, “ Glory be to God, but it is a purty world !”

When we crossed the boundaries, passed the lodge gates into the demesne lying around Rappa Castle, the residence of Captain Knox, there was a change to still greater beauty. Money will build a grand and stately home in the fair proportions of a castle, but money has to run in the blood for centuries to produce a scene like this. Broad lands swelling and sinking like an emerald sea, trees that stand out singly wrap themselves in aristocratic leafiness, spreading their magnificent arms toward you, saying, “ Look at me ! I am not of yesterday ; the dews of heaven, the fatness of the earth, the leisure of centuries, fanned by breezes, tended by culture, have made me what I am, a ‘ thing of beauty’ to gladden your eyes.” They stand in groups upon the slopes and whisper this to one another ; they open their ranks to give you delicious glimpses into further away “ spots of delight :” they are drawn up in ranks shading mysterious walks that lead away into the grand dim woods. They distract you and bother you with their loveliness till you wish that the English language had a bushel more adjectives.

Rappa Castle where we arrived with a beggarly feeling of having exhausted our adjectives is a large comfortable building not very much like one’s idea of a castle. We drove up to the rear entrance—it is always prudent to take the lowest room—and waited on the car while a messenger was despatched with our request. Presently the messenger came back with directions to us to drive round to the hall door. We were received by a respectable servant in plain dark clothes, who looked like a minister or a mild edition of a churchwarden. He ushered us from the entrance hall—a comfortably furnished apartment—across a second, into the crowning glories of a third, where we were requested to wait till Captain Knox made his appearance, which was not a long time.

The owner of Rappa Castle, a landlord against whom nothing in the way of blame is said, was assuredly of as much interest to us as the relics which his house possessed. A tall, fine looking, kindly faced man, rosy with health, courteous and pleasant, came into the room. We told our errand and the Captain went for the Mias Tighernain and placed it in our hands. It is evidently only part of the original dish, the socket where the upper part rested being still there. It is very heavy, formed of three layers of thin bronze bound at the edge with brass—evidently a later thought, and done for preservation. There are three bands of silver across it, which show the remains of rich figuring. There was originally a setting of three stones, one of which still remains and looks as if it might be amber. It is as large as a soup plate. Something is among the layers of metal which rattles when shaken. It is one of the oldest relics in the country. Whoever made it had no mean skill in the art of working metals. According to a certain Father Walsh it was used to wash the saint’s hands in at mass. This dish, after lying at the bottom of Lough Conn for a hundred years, came up to the surface and revealed itself. It has been used as a revealer of secrets ever since it came into the hands of the Knox family. We requested afterwards to see the clock of Moyne Abbey, and were taken by the courteous captain across other rooms to the flagged kitchen where the clock ticked as it has done for three hundred years—or since the Abbey was dismantled, how long before history hath not recorded. The case is of some dark wood beautifully carved. I thought it was bog oak ; Captain Knox said mahogany, which would make the case to be much younger than the clock. The Captain assured us that it was the best time-keeper in the world. It only requires winding once a month ; used to show the day of the month, but some meddler disarranged

that part of the machinery. The dial plate is of some white metal, brilliant and silvery. Captain Knox said it was brass, but I have seen things look more brazen that were not so old.

Nothing could exceed the courtesy of Captain Knox. He made some enquiries about Canada, and deplored the rush of cattle across, which was injurious to the interests of graziers, of whom he was one. It would have been discourteous to express the wish that lay in my mind, that they might come in such numbers as to lower the price of cows and grazing also till the poor man might be able to have a cow oftener and milk to his “yellow male” stir-about till it might be not quite so impossible to replace the cow seized for the rent and the County Cess.

I saw a trial in the papers lately of a woman who was in bed, in her shake-down, when she became aware that the cow—the only cow—was taking a lawful departure. Up she got, in the same trim as that in which Nannie danced in Kirk Alloway, and by the might of her arm rescued the cow. She was condemned to jail, but one’s sympathies go with the law breakers here often. At least mine do. I did sympathize with this woman of one cow and a large family. Why should any one have power lawfully to “lift” the only cow from half-starved children. The defence for this woman was that through trouble she did not know what she was doing. It was a mean, paltry defence ; she did know that she wanted to keep her cow, and the law should be altered to enable her to do so. The law that enables men of means to strip these poor wretches of everything that stands between them and their little children and starvation, is a monstrous law for Christians to devise and execute, and is worse for the rich and for the executive of the law than even for the sufferers. All these things flashed through my mind as we conversed with Captain Knox.

On leaving Rappa Castle we paused a little on the doorsteps to take one more look at the beauty of the grounds. I wish I had words to convey to others a little of the delight which the scene gave to me. The trees, branched down almost to the ground, have gotten themselves into so many graceful attitudes. The bending thick-leaved branches look like green drapery, the larch flings its tassels down in long pendants fluttering in the breeze, the spruce and balsam—they are a little unlike ours of the same name, but I do not know any other names for them—rise in pyramids of dark green tipped with sunny light green, the cedars fling their great arms about cloaked with rich foliage, the laburnums shake out their golden ringlets and tremble under the weight of their beauty, the copper beeches stand proudly on an eminence where every graceful spray shows against a background of blue sky. There are vistas opening among the trees giving glimpses of the brightest green and dashes of waters like bits of captured sky.

I gave a glance at the owner, tall and stately, with ruddy, pleasant face and kind blue eye, and acknowledged that he looked every inch an English squire.

With many thanks for his kindness we took our departure. Were glad to hear from both friend and car driver that nothing of cruelty and oppression could be laid to the charge of this man. As I stood beside him at his own door, drawing all of the beauty I could into my soul through my eyes to carry away with me, I thought if I were born into that place with its associations, could I, would I mar any corner of it to make a homestead for starving Thady, ragged Bidy, and the too numerous children ? Who knows what transformation might lie in the pride and power of possession !

There was a single laborer working before the castle raking up the gravel walk, I think. “I would he were fatter !” If he were only in as good condition as the beautiful dogs of superior breed which we saw in the castle yard ; but the dogs are fed at the expense of the proprietor

of this fair domain, the thin laborer at his own. We returned by another way. After we left the grounds we noticed with sad eyes the miserable cabins and barren fields at his gates. People of the upper, middle and comfortable classes are so used to horrible cabins, thin laborers, old women, barefoot, toothless, ragged and wretched, begging by the wayside to keep out of the dreaded workhouse, that the sight makes not the slightest impression. People tell me over and over again that they deserve their poverty, for it is the result of extravagance and drunkenness. This assertion makes one stare and then consider whose faces show the greater evidence of the action of different liquors. It would be an easy matter in a national gathering to pick out the class and the strata of society that is the support of the liquor traffic in Ireland.

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Workhouses—The Poor Law—A Reasonable Suspect.

Returning from Rappa Castle we must pass the Ballina workhouse. My friend had business there. As it was Board day, and I had about an hour to spare, I thought I would look in and see what I thought of it in the light of a possible refuge for many evicted ones. There were some wretched looking people, applicants for out-door relief, waiting about the entrance when we went in. I have been informed and have seen it confirmed in newspaper reports of the proceedings of Boards of Guardians, that it is a rule of universal application by every means possible to discourage out-door relief in every form. “ Let the poor come into the union altogether,” is the spirit that actuates the Boards of Guardians, so it was pointed out to me that these applicants for out-door relief had small chance of success.

It was a Board day, and the master of the house, a polite little man, apologized profusely for not accompanying me over the building. He deputed the schoolmaster of the establishment to show me through in his place. I followed the Ballina Schoolmaster of the Union from the entrance along the gravel walk bordered with flowers to the house proper, and into the refectory or eating room. One does not want in every workhouse to look at the same things, when they see they are the same as in the last. I noticed the set of printed rules hung up on a card and lifting it down sat down to read the rules contained on it. They were very strict, and conceived in such a spirit that a naturally tyrannical man could make a pauper’s life a very miserable burden to him.

After I read these rules I questioned the schoolmaster, a very nice person, as to the administration of this work-house. He casually mentioned that able-bodied paupers only got two meals in the day. This was such a surprising statement to me that I said, “ Your workhouse then is harder to the poor inmates than the workhouses elsewhere. I have made enquiry in several places as to the diet given, and they invariably told me of three meals, mentioning also that they had meat allowed them three times per week. They have given you “ the infirmary diet,” said the schoolmaster, gravely. We conversed a little while on this subject, and as I was to go by train to Castlebar, fearing my time was too short, I did not penetrate into the workhouse any further.

Coming out we encountered the doctor, a very courteous person. Hoping to get further information, confirmatory or contradictory of this most astounding piece of news respecting the food allowance, I referred to it before the doctor, who qualified the statement by informing me that if actually engaged at work for the house they were allowed a third meal. I was thoroughly surprised at this. The conviction forced itself upon me, that the poor having taken refuge in the house from actual starvation, the house considered itself justified in keeping them on short commons ever after.

As I left the building feeling very sad over this information, I could not help wishing that these creatures, guilty of the crime of poverty, had the nourishing fare given to the criminals in our common gaol at Pembroke on the Ottawa. Now the workhouses are by no means crowded ; the Ballina workhouse, for instance, is empty enough to afford a wing as a temporary barracks for some military. I have been told by what I consider good authority, that for every shilling levied of the distressingly great poor rate eightpence is needed to pay the administrative officials. While thinking of these things, I take up the Castlebar local paper and notice in the report of the proceedings of the Board of Guardians, that a doctor not attending to his duty through being “ in a state of health not compatible with much exposure to rough weather or country professional work,” was to be allowed for a still greater length of time a substitute at three guineas per week. During the debate on this motion a member reminded the Board that last year they paid £54 for substitute work for one official on the plea of ill-health ; another complained that sums of £50 were voted to officials, while paupers were denied shillings of outdoor relief. Still another complained that the auditors would disallow the relief given to cases which require relief, while they never disallow sums paid incurred by leave of absence of officials.

The whole administration of the poor law is complained of pretty universally in this style. The poor rate is excessively high, the administration very expensive, and the economy is practised where it is least needed, is the complaint I hear again and yet again.

At the station a great crowd and a rather excited one was assembled. A Mr. Moffany had been arrested as a reasonable suspect, and was to be taken to Kilmainham. The man who was arrested was a small, sickly-looking, by no means interesting specimen of humanity, slightly lame. He was in some sort of shop-keeping business. The crowd on the platform was dense and composed mostly of the poorer class, who were enthusiastic enough for anything. The policemen in charge, civilly and politely, with no fuss or force, got their suspect into a second class carriage and got in beside him. The suspect put his head out of the window and addressed the crowd, expressing his willingness to suffer for the good cause, and said he was not likely to come out of the prison alive owing to his state of health. He advised them to be law-abiding and to go home quietly.

Oh, the cheering there was ; the endeavors to get near enough to shake him by the hand ; the surging to and fro of the crowd, the half-crying hurrahs of the women ; the waving of handkerchiefs and caps was something to be remembered. As the train moved off slowly the people ran alongside cheering themselves hoarse, shouting words of encouragement and blessing, of hope and farewell till the train quickened its speed and left them behind.

The Letters of “ Norah” on Her Tour Through Ireland : Being a Series of Letters to the Montreal ... (1882)

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