

Letters from the west of Ireland 1884

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CONG, MAYO, *September 9.*

CONNEMARA. scenery can never have been in greater beauty than on the night when I drove back from Kylemore to Leenane. The full moon dimmed the twinkle of the stars, scarcely a cloud was to be seen, not a breath of air was stirring, each summit stood out clear as at noon-day, and the black shadows of the opposite mountains fell across the silvery loughs. Yet it was little of a surprise, though much of a disappointment, when I looked out next morning on a thick grey drizzle. Such sharp transitions in the weather are the rule rather than the exception here. The rain came down heavier and more heavily, and towards afternoon it was tumbling in torrents. But it is worse than idle waiting in the hope of improvement on the morrow, so I ordered round the car that was to take me to Cong. For the benefit of other travellers, I may mention how I manage to make myself pretty nearly weather-proof. I wear a heavy and thickly lined ulster of native Irish frieze, and as the rain is often chilly the warmth is comfortable. Though the ulster is warranted to throw off almost any amount of wet, to save the trouble of drying in the inns over that is drawn an ordinary water-proof. With flax shooting-gaiters and a waterproof wrapper tucked in under double-soled boots, the rain can only penetrate at the neck, and hardly there unless it is blowing half a gale. The heavy wet of Connaught, even when you have it in excess, is unlike any I have met with elsewhere. Behind the falling sheets of water, the heavens keep lightening as if the day meant to clear up in another quarter of an hour—of which it has not the slightest intention. But the consequence is, that through the watery veils you may distinguish the mountains with sufficient plainness, though each of them is shrouded in diaphanous mists. And as a showery day shows the lights, the colours, and the shadows, so even a relentless downpour is not without its advantages. Hitherto I had been driving through the hill scenery after an unusually protracted drought ; the streams in the valleys had shrivelled up, and the small hill-burns had run dry. Driving towards Lough Corrib, the whole country was surging, foaming, and murmuring with the rush and fall of rising waters. We followed the course of the river Maam through the bogs, always sweeping in a brown torrent round the corners, and often flooding the intervening haughs. It was fed from the hills by a thousand little tributaries, falling from shelf to shelf in creaming cascades. And the sides of the more distant of the hills seemed streaked in all directions by long white seams or scars, which were simply the water precipitating itself almost perpendicularly, till suddenly it plunged into a pool on a bit of flat behind some inequality, to pursue its course for a time out of sight, though sooner or later to reappear. The very ditches by the roadside had become lively brooks, running along under a green fringe of ferns and flowerless foxgloves.

After a short, sharp climb from Leenane, we have crossed the lofty watershed ; and the Maam, which we have been following, now helps to drain the vast watery basin of Lough Corrib. Sheep and cattle that have been driven down from the high grazings are standing huddled together in the valley bottom in piteous plight, often bogged half-way up to the hocks in swamp. They have been collected for the fair on next Monday at Leenane, and in this part of the valley are two or three large hill farmers, one of them owning nearly 260 cattle. Cattle have fallen, as I said, as well as the fleeces of the sheep ; but the sheep themselves fetch fair prices—as much as 26s. or 27s. A little further, and we are among holdings of the smallest size, the cultivated patches dwindling as the hovels become more and more miserable, till things are almost at their worst near the bridge of Maam. Strange to say, the men are not extraordinarily poorly clad, but nowhere hitherto, not even near Gweedore, have

I seen such deplorably dressed women. The ragged petticoat came barely below the naked knees, while over the head and the tattered gown that clung close to the person was a flimsy shawl, their only protection against the downpour that must long before have soaked them to the skin. Little girls in low thin frocks, and without even the shawls, were cowering under cover of the banks of peat as they looked after a couple of sheep or a cow. No wonder that the faces of these poor people were soured and sad, as they well might have been in much brighter weather. If agitation smoulders down where the tenants are prosperous, it must certainly find inflammable materials among a population like this—wretched and hopeless, bigoted and brutally ignorant. And so it does ; for this is “ Joyce’s country,” of infamous reputation for its outrages, undoubtedly the most blood-stained of the districts of Ireland—that of Bear, to the south of Kenmare Bay, ranking perhaps the next to it. Not many miles from Leenane, we passed a lane leading across to Maamtrasna and Lough Mask, which lies about eight miles away to the north-east among the mountains. We may take it as a proof of the recent improvement of the county, thanks to the strict enforcement of the Crimes Act, that a small temporary police barrack, erected at the corner of that lane, had been removed on the morning of that very day. We passed a string of carts carrying away planks, roofing, and furniture, under the escort of the late occupants of the barrack. They were falling back upon the posts near Maam bridge, beyond which I remarked an unusually good house of a couple of storeys in a singularly bleak situation. There being no sort of outbuildings to indicate a farm-steading, I asked to whom it belonged, and found that it was the central fortress of the police in these wilds, no fewer than fourteen men being quartered there. Even the upper windows were protected by loopholed iron plates against volleys of ball. A few miles further we came upon the little Mountmorres property, prettily planted, an *enclave* in the great estates of Lord Ardilaun. It was the property of the unfortunate Lord Mountmorres, and inquiring who occupied the house at present, I was told that it is also tenanted by policemen. In fact, no small number of men must be indispensable to picket and patrol even the more habitable outskirts of that savage and inaccessible country. As near the Bloody Foreland, so here, the aborigines have scarcely been disturbed from time immemorial, Nine-tenths of them are said to bear the names of the ancient septs of the Joyces or the Coynes.

Even through rain and mists it was a magnificent view of the wild hydrography of Loughs Mask and Corrib, with the rugged neck of land that divides them, for the road climbs by zig-zags to a great elevation. All around and beneath us are hills and promontories intercrossing and interlocking, through which we have glimpses of sheets of water lying between and beyond. Immediately below is the broad expanse of Lough Corrib, dotted about with its rocky or wooded islands. On one of the nearest of these, off the embouchure of the Maam, are the picturesque ruins of the historical fortress of Castle Kirk, reminding me somewhat of Kilchurn Castle on Loch Awe. All the country through which we have been passing since we left Leenane is unfit for human habitation ; and we may read the consequences of its misappropriation in its record of outrages and crimes. Great part of it belongs to Lord Ardilaun, notoriously one of the most liberal landlords in Ireland ; but when his lordship’s father bought it, he had to take over the starving paupers with the land, and he could not get rid of them if he would. Thanks to emigration, they are thinning now, and a happy thing it is for all parties. Yet this wild valley is rich in the extreme, were it only turned to its natural uses. Nowhere have I seen finer grazing, and many of the cattle and the sheep were in high condition ; and, with some judicious hill draining, we should say in Scotland that it was magnificent ground for a first-class deer-forest. How far the deer would do well on these bare Connanght hills, in this west Irish damp, I do not know, and in any case the surrounding peasants would soon make short work of them.

Lord Mountmorres's house was made familiar to English people by many views in the illustrated papers at the time of the murder. With the little grass plot among its copses and shrubberies before it, with the six windows and the plain doorless front, it looks more like the residence of a second-rate Mid-Lothian farmer than of a nobleman, and assuredly has no aristocratic pretensions about it. Two miles on the Leenane side of Cong, my friendly driver turned up a side road for 150 yards. He pulled up before a gap in a loose stone wall which had evidently been recently repaired. Either by chance or designedly, the top stone in the breach was a small black slab, much like a tombstone in miniature ; and that slab marks the spot whence the ruffians fired on their victim. And to have done with the melancholy list of outrages, I may remark that next day Mr Burke, Lord Ardilaim's agent, who resides in the neighbourhood of Cong, pointed from the high grounds in Ashford Park to a strangely beautiful scene among the lovely Lough Mask mountains. Where the summits rose on either side with the grandest effects, a mountain gradually fell away into a long promontory, seeming to stretch right across the lake glistening in the afternoon sun. " That," said Mr Burke, " is the point of Kilbride ; up the valley among those high hills to the left is Maamtrasna ; while the lough arm winding at the back of the promontory is Cloughbreck, where the Huddies—the bailiffs who were sewn up in sacks—were thrown into the water by their murderers."

As for Cong, it is a mean village, very strikingly situated among barren rock, rich wood, and rushing waters. We enter it over a picturesque bridge ; in the broad street, before the little inn, stands a venerable stone cross with an ancient inscription. But it is on passing out of the street at the upper end that we are struck by the full force of the contrasts. To the northward of the road there is nothing to be seen but hills and great boulders of the dark-grey limestone, huddled about in the wildest confusion, except where here and there they have been built into some unfinished stretch of wall ; while on the other hand the road is actually overhung by the woods and flourishing young plantations of Lord Ardilaun, enclosing the park and the meadows of soft velvety turf. The road appears to divide desolation from extreme fertility ; as the river which flows at right angles to it separates county Mayo from county Galway. In reality those appearances of desolation to the northward are somewhat deceptive. That wilderness of limestone rock extends for full six miles, to where the lands of Lord Ardilaun meet those of Lord Kilmaine. But if you mount any of the eminences and survey the district, you will see that everywhere in the dips and hollows patches of good pasturage are interspersed among the rocks. As for the richness on the opposite side of the road, there is no delusion as to that. There is marl as well as limestone in great profusion ; so that the means of fertilising a naturally fine soil are available to any extent. Lord Ardilaun has employed them freely in his park and immediate domains, though whether his outlay would have repaid a practical farmer is another question. That rocky isthmus to the north abounds in natural curiosities. The river that connects the two loughs burrows through a natural tunnel for three-fourths of its course, like the streams in the very similar formations of Carniola and Carinthia. Here, too, by shafts and holes opening into recesses and caverns, the visitor may observe the subterraneous flow of the stream. And there is an artificial object of interest at least as remarkable. Beyond the inn, and close by a huge and abandoned corn mill, are locks of the most massive masonry, in the bed of an almost completed canal. It was one of Government's great public works under-taken to employ the starving poor during the famine year. The canal was intended to link the loughs, and had actually been almost finished, when it was found, though somewhat late, that the elaborate scheme literally would not hold water. The water, in fact, drained away through flaws in the porous limestone. But the amount of money flung away everywhere in that famine time must have been extraordinary ; and it seems to have been the exception when anything useful was finished. Thus, on the day when I drove from Belleek to Ballyshannon, I saw the remains of roads on either side of the Erne valley, and though they were green as the surrounding grazings, they could be traced at intervals along miles.

Ashford Castle is a noble pile of buildings in castellated style, partly of white granite, partly of the grey limestone. Here again, as at Kylemore, vast sums must have been expended, and the neighbourhood far and near must have benefited by those golden showers. Nor has any one of the Ardilaun tenants, so far as I know, had cause to complain that his landlord has dealt hardly by him. Yet, on reliable information, precautions were taken for long against Ashford being blown up by American dynamiters ; and it is suggestive of the character of the surrounding country, that the police never succeeded in laying their hands on these men, who, unless they were very admirably disguised, should have been conspicuous enough among the miserable peasants. Besides a force of police. Lord Ardilaun, when in residence, keeps a formidable body of retainers of his own under arms ; and when he entertained the gentry of the county at a ball, revolvers were *de rigueur* as a part of the ball costume, though they were left in the cloak-room with the hats and overcoats. As for his lordship's land agent, till the other day he quartered four policemen in his backyard, and never stirred abroad without a couple in attendance. To the stranger it seems a delicate matter dispensing with that habitual guard, since the relative impunity with which outrages may be perpetrated is almost offering an invitation to them. But the district, as I have said, is become quieter in the meantime, and long familiarity with danger begins to breed indifference. Nor could anything be more peaceful than the scene in the Ashford grounds on Sunday afternoon, when parties of humble visitors, admitted freely by ticket, were turning up from all distances on foot or in cars. They lounge about the terraces, gazing up at the great mansion, which naturally struck them the most. For myself, I found the beauties of the park more attractive, with the herds of red and fallow deer grouped about under the trees, with the river running through the lawns to Lough Comb, entering by an estuary, where a smart steam yacht lay moored almost under the castle walls, and with the well-kept approaches winding through the woods. Between the park and the village are the picturesque remains of Cong Abbey, once famous for its wealth and for the richness of its sacred ornaments ; so that money must have been æsthetically lavished in these wilds long before the golden days of the Guinnesses.

Lord Ardilaun now possesses some 15,000 acres in the neighbourhood. It was in 1852 that the late Sir Benjamin Guinness bought Ashford of Lord Oranmore as a small residential estate, being captivated by the extreme beauty of the spot, and intending merely to build a cottage *ornéé*. In 1860 he added the adjacent Rosshill, sold to him by Lord Charlemont and Lord Leitrim, who had married the two Miss Berminghams, who were co-heiresses. Oddly enough, the next purchase in 1864 was also from co-heiresses—from the Misses Blake, nieces of the late Sir Valentine Blake. It was that of Doon, and the picturesquely situated island ruin of Castle Kirk is a part of it. I have not visited the Doon property, where there is a handsome shooting-lodge, but it is said to be as rich in natural attractions as Ashford. It was about the same time, I think, that 2000 of the most poverty-stricken of the acres which I passed through in the neighbourhood of Maam were acquired from Sir Richard O'Donnell, whom I mentioned in a letter from Westport as the former proprietor of Achill Island. Lastly, in 1870, the 6000 acres around the white shooting-lodge on the Lake of Kylemore were bought from Mr Finlay, a newspaper proprietor in Belfast, who had himself purchased them not very long before from the D'Arcys of Clifden, one of the oldest of the old Mayo families. So here, at least, in comparatively recent times, not a few of the “ good ould families” have been selling.

The average price of these lands was twenty years of the former rents ; of course the rents since then have in many cases been considerably reduced. Lord Ardilaun has a great extent of his hill-grazing in his own hands—in fact pretty nearly the whole of the country between the bridge of Maam and Lough Mask, and in particular the entire estate of Rosshill—owing to large tenants becoming bankrupt and other causes. In the Scotch Highlands, where the same sort of thing has been going on to a great extent, it is a sad misfortune for the unfortunate

lairds, owing to the fall in the prices of wool and mutton. In Ireland, on the contrary—and it marks the difference between the countries—Lord Ardilaun will probably have good cause for congratulation in the end, although he may be losing in the meantime. For the greatest possible recommendation in offering an Irish property now is that the landlord, in place of being a rent-charger living on tolerance among his tenants, should be the actual master of a part of his own lands, with the right to improve or to sublet as he pleases. That the security given by the Land Act for the tenants' improvements is an invaluable benefit to the country I can have no doubt. It does not affect the good landlords, while it binds the hands of the bad. But so far as I have seen, I am inclined to believe that fixity of tenure and free sale are far more questionable. At all events, I am sure that there are two sides to the question, and objections may be plausibly urged—not only from the landlord's, but from the public point of view. Absenteeism has been one of the standing curses of Ireland. Is it calculated to encourage landlords to reside when they are not only curtailed of their privileges and pleasures, but discouraged from the work of improving a property which to all intents and purposes has passed out of their hands? A large land agent, with his great experience, has suggested another probable evil, which will directly affect the tenant. Hitherto when a farmer with a family died intestate, to avoid the evils of indefinite subdivision, the landlord had the right of selecting the successor. Now when there are, say, two or three sons and as many daughters, the question arises who shall come in? For the judicial rent fixes a judicial lease, governed by invariable conditions under the Act, which are not set forth in the covenants. Under these conditions subdivision is forbidden. The tenant-right on the death of an intestate is an asset which falls to be divided. It is surmised that in many cases the matter will begin with confusion and quarrels, which will lead inevitably to bad blood and blows. Then the relatives, turned enemies, will go to law, and law attorneys will reap a rich harvest. Though, after all, the lawyers can only advise a sale of the tenant-right and the farm-stocking as a preliminary to subdivision of the proceeds. But these practically forced sales will be the humble counter-parts of the great estates flung away by the sales in the Encumbered Estates Courts, and all the beneficiaries will lose heavily. I give the idea for what it may be worth, but it appears to me that there is something in it.

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GALWAY, *September 10.*

I SAW enough of Lough Corrib from the heights above Maam to know that the voyage from Cong to Galway must be most enjoyable in fine weather. Through a blinding drizzle there was nothing visible beyond the low-lying shores between the lake and the mountains. Here and there one could distinguish some shattered keep, standing out on a bold and defensible headland; and now and again there was the well-kept seat of some gentleman, with lawns sloping down to the water and surrounded by sheltering woods. But the prospects were as dreary as the day; the clouds, the rain, the rocks, and the lough, were all of the same neutral leaden tints. The steamer, though tolerably commodious, was a venerable boat, bearing the name of Eglinton, like one of the streets in Galway; from which I presume it had been launched when the host of the Eglinton tournament was her Majesty's representative in Ireland. Nevertheless, and although there was little in the scenery to admire, the voyage was not devoid of interest. Lough Corrib, the second of the Irish lakes in point of size, covering 30,000 Irish acres, seems on the maps to form two broad expanses of water, connected in the middle by a narrow channel. In reality the navigation is intricate in the extreme; and though much had been done at one time by the Government with the idea of opening up inland navigation through Loughs Mask and Conn northward to Killala, the passage must always be impracticable in the darkness or in thick fogs. For miles the steamer, continually slackening speed, twisted and turned between the double line of grey piles of stone, or of whitewashed

cairns surmounted by scarlet gridirons and beacons. Behind and between these were low limestone reefs or single slabs of stone, almost flush with the surface. Nor were these visible or half-invisible dangers the only ones. More than once, leaning over the side of the boat, I caught a glimpse, within a few feet, of a submerged block, barely covered by a couple of feet of water. That the old Eglinton has never come to signal grief, must be due to the skill and caution of her gallant commander, who, as I see, is about to be presented with a testimonial, which proves that the Galway folks are not ungrateful. Though I believe that the people along the shores occasionally go fishing, we saw not a single sail or boat ; the only living creatures, except some screaming sea-gull, were the black cormorants sitting everywhere on the grey rocks, sullenly betaking themselves to a low heavy flight as they were scared by the splash of the steamer's paddles. Three miles from the town we entered the narrow Corrib river, connecting the lough with the Bay of Galway.

Galway, with a dwindling population which only a few years ago numbered 13,000, is a picturesque old town going quickly to decay. Yet it enjoys every natural advantage, which ought to insure it a wealthy and busy vitality. The harbour, at slight expense, might be made the finest on the western coast ; the waterflow from the vast reservoir of Lough Corrib, with its fall of 14 feet, might drive any amount of machinery. Galway has had a long and eventful history, and the remains of imposing buildings scattered about the poverty-stricken streets are so many melancholy memorials of former prosperity. It may be said to have been built by the English for the Irish. The founders of what still proudly styles itself " the City of the Tribes," were the English and Welsh chivalry, with their followers, who settled here when the place was stormed in the middle of the fifteenth century by De Burgh, the Earl of Ulster. " The Tribes," as they were contumeliously called by Cromwell's soldiers for the constancy with which they hung together, showing a united front to the army of the Parliament, were the Blakes, the Bodkins, the Lynches, the Frenches, &c., who, buying out or driving out the aboriginal proprietors, became the great land-owners of Galway county. Those families had made their fortunes chiefly in the Spanish trade, and to this day many of the houses, with their inner courtyards, bear unmistakable traces of the architecture the Spaniards borrowed from the Moors. The money that was made by shrewd and bold commercial dealings was squandered subsequently in riotous living by the descendants of the patrician merchants. The town was abandoned for the country, the trade died away, and, with few exceptions, the lands of those heavily embarrassed Galway families changed hands under forced sales in the Encumbered Estates Court

Yet trade has revived again comparatively recently ; and though the citizens are now lamenting their vanishing prosperity, at the first glance to the eye of a stranger there is a certain amount of bustle in the place. There are ships and a steamer of two unloading at the quays, there are blocks of great warehouses, which may be filled or empty, and the view from the bridge which carries the main street across the Corrib is picturesquely suggestive of the predominating industry. A rapid side stream meets the broad current of the main river ; an enormous meal mill stands on the promontory between ; while sundry similar establishments of nearly equal pretensions tower over the tops of the houses in the middle distance. In the backwater, between the double currents, an angler immersed almost to his waist is whipping out the small river-trout which are flinging themselves several feet out of the water around him. And between the bridge and the pool where he is cooling his legs, long narrow gardens run down to the river from the back of a row of ancient mansions, each garden having its own water-gate, with a flight of steps leading down to a landing-place. Until lately, there were seven or eight of these mills, all doing a flourishing business. Besides their staff of clerks, book-keepers, &c., they employed about three hundred ordinary hands. The wheat they ground was imported from all parts of the world, to be distributed through Galway to the

adjacent country; but the times have changed with the arrival of enterprising intruders. Americans and Australians preferred to send flour in place of wheat, the flour in freight occupying only one-fourth of the bulk of the unground grain ; while they did the grinding at home, and kept what the trade calls the offal. The diminution in the home supplies of that offal alone has been a serious loss to the peasants and pig-breeders of the neighbourhood. Formerly they could buy it for 3s. 6d. per cwt at any of the mills ; now they must pay at least double the money. Moreover, the increasing importation of that foreign meal has been cutting the ground from under the feet of the mill-owners. One of them has closed his mill already, and the others are apprehensive that they will soon have to follow his example. Nor do they even compete for the purchase and distribution of the foreign importations, which seem to have been monopolised by the great Belfast house of Richardson, whose name I have read on enormous warehouses, not only here but in Ballina and Sligo. It might be presumed that the impending stoppage of these mills would be a black look-out for the poor people to whom they have hitherto given employment. But, strange to say, the demand for labour here has latterly been far in excess of the supply. I had an interesting conversation on the subject with Mr Harrison, the manager of a flourishing jute factory. Under very different circumstances this factory was started by a few local philanthropists thirteen years ago, mainly with the object of giving employment to the poor. It began with twenty-eight looms ; now there are seventy, and it has become the second largest jute factory in Ireland. At that time daily wages were 10d., now they average 2s. 6d. At present the factory directors would gladly engage two hundred additional hands, which they find it impossible to obtain ; and they have actually, though unsuccessfully, expostulated with the American emigration agents, who are tempting their best young women to leave them. *Apropos* to the price of labour, I may mention that a gang of rather ruffianly dock labourers while ships are unloading frequently receive 7s. a day ; while many more respectable men have regular occupation at 25s. and 30s. per week. At the jute factory, the wages of the workers, who are chiefly women, vary, strangely, according to temperament rather than skill. All that is needed is close attention to the looms, of which not a few of the girls are quite incapable. With one who watches assiduously, ever ready to take up a thread when it snaps, the machinery seldom stops, and she may earn a sovereign a-week ; while her neighbour, whose eyes are anywhere or everywhere, may only receive six or seven shillings. The number of hands at work in the factory is 300 ; but it gives employment to nearly twice as many more out of doors, in the way of stitching sacks, &c. At first the speculation yielded handsome returns ; now it barely pays 5 per cent on the small capital. But then it is still partially conducted on philanthropical principles, which will have to be abandoned sooner or later, if it is not to close its doors. Thus by the use of sewing-machines, which it has been trying on a small scale, it can do the work for tenpence which costs half-a-crown when done by hand. And untaxed foreign competition is telling against it as seriously as the rise in wages. Nine-tenths of the jute manufactured at home is disposed of in foreign markets. Russia and America have been the largest customers. But a sack which costs 6d. at Galway, pays 6½d. of dues on delivery at a Russian port ; while the custom charges in America are even heavier.

Now that Galway is losing the advantage of cheap labour, the native Americans and the Russians begin to have it all their own way. The growing scarcity of labour is owing, of course, to the emigration which has been going on from Galway to an unparalleled extent. And here, for the first time, I have heard of a new aspect of the emigration question, and of the somewhat mysterious conditions under which it has been conducted. Besides the assisted and the independent emigration, with which we have become familiar, I hear of free-handed agents from America who make a secret of the parties for whom they are acting. They have taken up their quarters in the best hotels ; they appear to have ample funds at their disposal ; and they address their proposals promiscuously to all classes. They are said to have shipped many of the Connemara peasants ; and when these poor people came up to embark for

America, they had cast their rags, they were decently clothed, they carried bundles containing a change of dress, and had a trifle of money in their pockets. I inquired how the agents proposed to secure or recoup themselves for the outlay. I was told that they drew up formal contracts, which it was believed would “hold water” in the States, by which the emigrants bound themselves to their service for a certain number of years, or until the debts were discharged with interest. The employers of Galway complain that the Factories Act, limiting the hours of labour to fifty-six hours in the week, leads to a great deal of disadvantageous misrepresentation. The American agents dazzle the Irish workers by statements of the amounts that might be earned by labouring an indefinite time. And there have been cases of girls going out and coming back, preferring shorter hours and the Saturday half-holiday to the high-pressure pace at which they were driven on the other side of the Atlantic. Indeed so great has been the emigration mania, that tradesmen have gone who were believed to be realising £3 per week.

And the contagion has even spread to the Galway fishermen—as characteristic, as prejudiced, and as home-loving a set of people as are to be met with anywhere. Still, true to their instincts, they have gone out in bands to settle down in little colonies of their own in New England. Here they have always occupied an isolated quarter, which is called the Claddagh. It has been the habit to set them down as of pure Spanish descent—although I can see nothing about them to support the theory. Their names are almost invariably English or Welsh, and in their appearance they are far more Saxon than either Spanish or Celtic. They used to live under an elective monarchy, and their king exercised nearly arbitrary authority ; all disputes were referred to him, and his decisions were final. It would appear that time has abolished that form of government, and the change has not been for the better. Differences that were decided by the patriarch are fought out with fists and shillelahs. Hot partisans take part in the proceedings on either side, and in fact a free fight often rages through the settlement. It would be dangerous work for the police to interfere—the fishermen being hardy and stalwart men ; the females are scarcely less muscular, and the village is as formidable a position as irregulars would care to defend. Streets of low, thatched, whitewashed cottages cross each other at all manner of angles. Those streets are paved in a fashion, but the paving-stones can be easily picked up and converted into missiles. As for the cottages, though the quarters within may be cramped, they do not appear to be uncomfortable. Sometimes they have but a door with a single window ; more often there is a small chamber on either side of the entry. When I visited the place great groups of the men were sitting on rough benches of drift-timber, chatting, smoking, or meditating in serene indifference to the soaking drizzle. Though foul weather, it was a fair enough fishing day ; but that was nothing to the purpose. I am told that these Claddagh men will never put to sea so long as there is sufficient in the house to keep the pot boiling. Should they make a good haul on a Monday, they will lounge away the rest of the week. At the same time, they are the slaves of immemorial superstitions. There are unlucky days on which nothing will tempt them abroad, and of course they have a firm faith in signs and omens. They guard their rights of commonty on the sea as jealously as the squatters and bog-tenants look after the hill-grazings. Although in that instance they may have acted on more intelligible grounds, they have made the bay too hot for stranger trawlers—cutting the nets and injuring the gear. There are two or three small trawlers hailing from Galway, with which they have come to an amicable understanding, in consideration of receiving a royalty on the takes. They have still a fleet of nearly a hundred boats, ranging to about ten tons burden—though not many years ago, on favourable days, 500 or 600 craft would put to sea simultaneously. How they lived then by the sale of their fish—considering there were neither markets nor communications—is a mystery. Then the fish were sold for next to nothing in Galway—a fine hake being given away for twopence. Now that the fish can be despatched to Dublin and other cities, a hake as heavy would cost 2s., and Galway is always wretchedly supplied. Yet in the meantime, like much of the improvable land, the fisheries of Galway must be left to lie fallow. As the Claddagh Corporation will tolerate no

competition, so they set their faces against new-fangled innovations. When Mr Brady, the inspector of fisheries, would have supplied them with modern nets and boats, they stolidly reverted to their obsolete fashions. I may mention another trait related by a friend of mine. A particular rock being much in the way of the fishers, he collected £70 to have it blasted. Calling on some of the men for a few days' labour, they unanimously refused, unless he would agree to pay them regular wages, needless to say that the money was returned to the subscribers, and the rock still remains as it was. A similar system of aggressive trades-unionism exists among the labourers on the wharves—which explains the occasional rate I referred to, when unloading has to be paid at 7s. a-day. Like the boatmen of the Rhone ports, their brethren of the Galway quays will tolerate the intrusion of no outsiders, and succeed in exacting the terms they demand.

But while the sea-fishings are more than half neglected, the salmon-fishings in the Corrib have become extremely profitable. The salmon swarm here ; at the height of the running season they may be seen lying densely packed in the bed of the stream below the bridges. Till about twenty years ago, the netting was in the hands of the Rev. Mr Eyre of Cork, who then sold it for £5000 to Mr Ashworth of Manchester, a relative of Mr Bright. Mr Ashworth made a lucky bargain. Owing to extensive harbour improvements, which involved the construction of weirs and the cutting a deep trench in the Corrib channel, by which the salmon could run up in the driest seasons, the value of the fishings was so greatly raised, that on Mr Ashworth's death, ten years after his purchase, they were estimated at about £60,000. Nor is that surprising, considering that so many as 800 to 1000 fish have frequently been netted in a single day. Now the fishings belong to Mr Ashworth's son-in-law, who has taken another gentleman into partnership.

The port of Galway, even as it is, has the capacity for doing a first-class trade. One hundred and forty thousand pounds have been recently spent in deepening the channel and constructing a dock which could offer accommodation to the Allan liners, which come regularly into the roadstead once a fortnight through great part of the year. But the only important exports consist of the emigrants, whom the few employers of labour begin so sorely to miss. On an average each one of those Allan liners carries away about 250 souls, and I am credibly assured that in the last two years nearly 30,000 people must have sailed from this port of Galway. Otherwise the small trade is steadily diminishing ; though, as I said, there are still considerable imports of flour and meal. Besides that, there is a service of goods steamers from Glasgow, which bring, as to Westport, the various stores and the coal for which western Ireland is absolutely dependent on Scotland. The trade, as I remarked in a former letter, is tending always towards the eastward ; and Galway, with its exceptional natural advantages, has lost all internal power of recovery. An old inhabitant informs me that forty years ago there were six or eight rich resident merchants who could hold their own with any capitalists in Dublin. All these men have disappeared, leaving no representatives behind them ; and he tells me likewise that in those forty years not a single new firm of any consequence has started in business between Galway and Derry. Energy is paralysed, and enterprise has departed. It will be remembered that Mr Orrell Lever, then member for the town, made a strenuous effort to resuscitate it. He raised capital, he floated a company, and he started a line of Atlantic steam-packets. The enterprise failed speedily and signally. One vessel was nearly wrecked in the bay ; another was burnt on the other side of the Atlantic. I believe it is a fact that the workmanship of vessels bought in a hurry had been scandalously scamped, and, of course, there were the usual rumours of foul play, with circumstantial charges against competing companies. Be that as it may, the shareholders were swamped ; and the only memorial of the disastrous undertaking is the vast Railway Hotel in which I am now writing. Something like £40,000 was expended on it ; the upper half is only half

finished ; and there is one unused grand saloon on the first floor in which the half of a regimental battalion might conveniently dine. I must add that the furnished part is very comfortable ; and the best of the extremely lofty bedrooms are provided with every luxury. There is no reason now why a line of Transatlantic packets should not successfully establish a terminus in Galway Bay, which is the nearest roadstead to New York and Newfoundland, always supposing that the capital could be found elsewhere, and that little co-operation were expected from the Galway people. There are but two obstructions in the open channel, and these could be cheaply removed since they are not even rock, but merely indurated clay, interspersed with boulders which could easily be blasted ; while, by constructing a few hundred yards of artificial breakwater, the bay could be protected against south-western gales, and converted into a perfect harbour of refuge.

The decay of a once prosperous town has more than kept pace with the diminishing of the sea-traffic. Except for the signs of age that make ruin seem respectable, a walk about the principal streets leaves the impression of a city sacked and bombarded. Galway looks like Strasburg as I saw it immediately after Strasburg's capture by the Germans. There are roofless houses without end ; there are abandoned tenements with shivered window-panes, or else with the doors and windows boarded up. Aristocratic mansions, with coats of arms and bishops' mitres on their sculptured facades, have been degraded into whisky shops and mean grocery stores. As for those great warehouses near the wharves, they are spectral in their desolation. But I happen to be able to give some figures which are more eloquent than any description can be. One warehouse, built thirty years ago for about £8000, has just been sold for £240, with £40 of ground-rent. The Galway Tramway Company—for there is a tramway here to the suburb of Salthill, near to which, by the way, is some of the most miserable land in the county—pays £50 per annum for premises with great ranges of stabling, which were erected at a cost of £6000. Another immense warehouse, in the “ most eligible situation,” looking actually down upon the docks, sold the other day for £1400. And to finish a gloomy picture, throughout the neighbourhood for many a mile round residential properties are as much at a discount. Thus fourteen years ago, in a distance of fourteen miles along the road from Oughterard, there were no less than fourteen hospitable gentlemen's houses. At this moment, only one of these is kept open ; and it is averred that five-sixths of the lands in county Galway are ready to be offered to any one who will make a reasonable bid. The holdings on the estates are generally small ; the tenants are generally poor ; the lean cattle are bought up by the Meath graziers to be fattened and forwarded to England ; profits are small ; payments of rent are backward and precarious ; the people have few savings to transfer to banks ; and as a logical consequence there have been outrages or disturbances, which make the position of the Galway landlords anything but enviable. Of course, there are exceptions among these landlords, and Colonel O'Hara of Lenaboy is one of them. He is chief director and half proprietor of the jute factory ; he presides over the Harbour Board, he has done much for the interests of the place and for the poor, and enjoys a well-deserved popularity.

ENNIS, CLARE, *September 11.*

BEFORE taking leave of Galway and the Connemara districts I may allude to a proposed railway to be carried from the town of Galway to the coast at Clifden—in fact, through the whole length of the former estates of the Martins. I believe that the scheme is so far advanced that, having passed the preliminary stages, it is about to be submitted to the Privy Council. The land would be got cheap ; the engineering, it is said, would not be difficult ; the whole cost is estimated by various authorities at something between £200,000 and £300,000. It is fondly hoped that in a few years the line might yield a fair return on the capital. How that might be I cannot say ; but for myself, I should doubt it. I have shown how trade has been dying away in these parts. I have dwelt on the draining of the flower of the population by

emigration ; and even if the country should be developed and the most be made of such insignificant ports as Clifden and Letterfrack, I cannot see whence a paying traffic is to be derived. Unless the charges are more reasonable than on some other Irish railways, probably sheep and cattle would still be sent by road to all the local markets ; and before there can be important consignments of fish, the habits and appliances of the coast fishermen must be revolutionised. But always supposing the money were to be found, such a line would be an infinite blessing to tourists ; and if visitors could travel in comfortable railway carriages instead of in open cars, a Connemara Hotel Company might do a lucrative business. For undoubtedly the excessive damp of the climate, with precarious communications and primitive conveyances, are serious drawbacks to a successful and enjoyable tour. You might not shrink from a long weary drive, or even a wetting, were you pretty sure to be repaid in the end. But the traveller thinks twice before driving to some back-of-the-world destination merely to be tantalised by the presence of magnificent scenery which may be invisible in the rains and mists. I speak feelingly on the subject, for I had set my heart on seeing the Cliffs of Moher, the grandest objects on the grand coast of Clare. But the stars, or rather the rains, fought against me in their courses. For two days I had waited on in Galway in the most penetrating wet it was ever my misfortune to encounter. It was not that the rain was unusually heavy, but the atmosphere within and without was saturated with moisture. The great Railway Hotel is as solidly built a house as any in the three kingdoms, yet when I laid my hand on the balustrades of the staircase, they felt as if they had been newly washed. The newspapers on the tables were so damp that they might have been just dipped in a washing-tub. The ink still runs on the paper I am using now, though the sheets had been stowed away under clothes in a closed portmanteau. In shorty one might as well have been breathing in a hermetically sealed shower-bath ; and as the weather clouds came washing up from the Atlantic, it would have been absurd to go in search of scenery on the shores of Clare. The third morning, however, broke with some watery sunshine, and on the chances of a brightening day I had made up my mind to go to Moher. The way from Galway to the popular little watering-place of Lisdoonvarna lies, in the first place, by steamer across the bay to Ballyvaughan on the Clare side. Otherwise one must make an interminable detour by road around the bottom of the bay. The boots, who is invariably consulted on such subjects in all Irish inns, spoke authoritatively as to the steamer's hour of departure ; but, as it proved, the boots knew nothing about it. I have spoken before of the eagerness to volunteer false information among the lower orders, and had another example of it that very day. I had brought an introduction to a gentleman in Ennis, and asked the Ennis boots where the house was. He informed me that it was a mile out of the town, and promptly added, " But sure, sir, the gentleman is in the town at this very moment ; it is not five minutes ago that I met him on the bridge." As it happened, the gentleman had left for Dublin the day before. So, my Galway counsellor having deceived me, and the weather beginning to dim again, I reluctantly gave up Moher and Lisdoonvama to come on to Ennis by rail.

Letters from the west of Ireland 1884

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