

On the third day in Ireland - 1852

Sir Frances B. Head, Bart

•
THIRD DAY.

At the fag-end of this summer, among a motley crowd of Tourists, by the irresistible power of Steam, I was injected into the island of Ireland, which I had never before seen. For a week, almost without winking, I looked it steadily in the face. For a similar period, in various localities, immured by myself, I was poring over data I deemed it necessary to obtain.

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On rising at six o'clock I found the wind had chopped round to the north-west, and that there was every prospect of a fine day—in short, the weather had apparently run itself quite dry, and as my travelling-bag of halfpence was nearly in the same state, after walking for a short time about the town I entered a large ale-house to beg change.

“ Have the evictions in this neighbourhood done you much harm ?” I inquired of a large man of about fifty, as very good-humouredly he was counting out from a small heap of copper.

“ It's ruining us all !” he replied. “ I now take 5/ at fairs where I used to take 20/, and on market-days 1/. where I used to get 7/.”

I had ordered breakfast, and as soon as I entered the large parlour of the inn I found its table heavily prepared for about twenty people. Looking out of the window for some little time, I fancied I was in the room by myself ; however, on hearing a slight muttering, I turned towards it, and then I perceived the jet black back and head of a very short priest on his knees, praying. As soon as the eggs came in he got up, and, as we were similarly disposed, we both sat down to breakfast together. His face, which was rather round and red, was completely covered with little pimples ; his neck was nil. However, in spite of all, he was very communicative, and so fond of eggs, and so fond of talking, that, as he sat eating and incessantly chattering to me, constantly repeating what he had just said, both corners of his mouth soon became as yellow as those of a young blackbird. He had ordered his bill, and it was lying before him.

“ They never,” said he, glancing at it and then addressing himself to me, “ charge a priest as much as they do others. They will charge *you* here 1s. 6d. or 2s. for your bed ; they charge *me* 1s. We never say a word about reduction ; and they do it of their own accord. When the cholera raged we were at their bedsides. We charged them nothing, and they appreciated it. In return they never charge us as much as others, but we never say a word for it.”

When my bill came,—for one's bill at an inn, like Death, is sure to come,—I asked the waiter what effect the evictions in the neighbourhood had had on the town ?

“ They have ruined it,” he replied ; “ the poor used to support the rich ; now that the poor are gone the rich shopkeepers are all failing. Our town is full of empty shops, and, after all, the landlord himself is now being ruined !”

As soon as I had defrayed my account, the waiter stepped aside to a table, from which he returned with a large book, in which he asked me to be so good as to inscribe my opinion—whatever it might be—of the accommodation I had received. As, however, I had really totally forgotten all about the turbot and lobster-sauce,—had slept so soundly that I had never for an instant thought about the bed,—and as the priest had talked so incessantly, that for the life of me I could not accurately state how many eggs we had eaten, I excused myself from complying with his request. In justice, however, to the Royal Hotel, Westport, I should say that on glancing over the leaves I read as follows : —

“ Mr. and Mrs. H. and Miss H., — of Bank, Yorkshire. We have found everything very comfortable.”

“ Judge and Mrs. P., Miss P., Miss D., and Miss R., have found this a comfortable house. The host and his people are very attentive and accommodating.”

“ I have been in worse and better hotels in this country.
(Signed) “ P. S.”

“ I have travelled over a great part of the world, and was never better entertained than in this establishment. (Signed) “ P. L.”

“ I have much pleasure in contributing my experience to the above compliment, as a hotel so worthy of praise in every department, whether in London, Dublin, or elsewhere, has never come under my notice.

(Signed) “ L. T., of R.”

“ Capital accommodation. (Signed “ V. L.”

My car was now at the door, and, bidding adieu to the landlord, whom I found at its side, I trotted sideways through the broad macadamized street until its acclivity brought our animal to a walk. At this sober pace we passed an immense union-workhouse, which in 1848, when “ the famine was sore in the land,” had administered out-door and in-door relief to no less than sixty thousand persons.

On reaching the summit of the hill I observed, on looking behind over the town beneath, that during the rain and mist of the previous day I had unconsciously passed a range of undulating mountains, the outline of which was now bold, clear, and distinct. At a short distance in front of us, on the right, was Croagh-Patrick, commonly called St. Patrick’s Reek, a magnificent mountain standing by itself. Its base and centre appeared to be covered with brown heather, which became more and more stunted, until its summit—a sharp-pointed pinnacle 2510 feet above the sea, and from whence it is said can be seen a distance of nearly a hundred miles—ended in bald sterility. Beneath it appeared the Atlantic and Clare Island. Before us was an open country teeming with large stones and bog, with here and there small brown or white cabins, from each of which in its peaceful solitude was to be seen meandering upwards into the fresh, pure morning air a small, short thread of white smoke. As we trotted along we passed a large, solid, new Protestant church, nearly finished.

“ When was the building of that church commenced ?” said I to a man seated at my back, whose face I had not yet seen. “ Yere Arnh’r,” replied a sharp, intelligent voice, “ I’m a stranger here like yereself : I only druff two gintlemen into Wesport yesterday from Sligo—*that’s* my country !—but the master’s horses were all engaged this morning, and so he asked ‘ Would I take yere Arnh’r ? ’ ” Somehow or other I felt quite pleased at the intelligence that I was to have no assistance but my own eyes, for the day, as compared with its predecessor in

office, was so lovely, and the prospect of entering the Connemara district so exhilarating, that I felt it mattered but little by what human names or nick-names the objects I was about to visit might be designated. "At all events," thought I, "I shall always meet somebody or other who will be able to tell me."

On my right, rushing down the side of a precipitous rock, was a slender stream of bog-water, nearly the colour of tawny port-wine, and shortly afterwards we passed a solitary cabin unroofed.

"What do you think," said I, leaning on my right elbow, as if disposed, in colloquial friendship, to meet my conductor half way, "What do you think of this system of eviction?"

"Yere Arnh'r," he replied, "it's just the ruin of the poor man. Before, every man had his four, five, eight, or even tin acres. He was rich, for his pitaturs kept him, his family, his horses, and his cows. He had arlways the pig to back him, and so at the half-year he could mate his landlord. Anybody might thin travel through the counthry with divil a halfpenny. They would be glad to have ye to converse with ye, give ye a good bed" (I thought of a certain bell-rope I had seen), "suppir, breakfist, and not seek of ye anything."

"But," said I, "could they manage to subsist *entirely* on potatoes?"

"Sure, yere Arnh'r," he replied, "with pitaturs they fed" (with his whip he here enumerated the following animals on the fingers of his left hand) "their pags,—toorkies,—gaise,—fools,—dooks,—hins,— and harses."

"Will sheep eat them?" I inquired.

"Troth, yere Arnh'r," he replied, "they'll *root* 'um ! Thim black crows steal pitaturs. Och !" he said, looking at me very archly as he shook his whip at one, "they're the biggest villins, yere Arnh'r !"

"That mare of yours is thorough-bred, isn't she?" I asked.

"Yes, indeed, yere Arnh'r, she's well got."

"Will donkeys," said I—we were at the moment passing one that was grazing afar off—"eat potatoes?"

"Oh yes, yere Arnh'r, and our dogs will ate um too. Gintlemen's dogs ate um with milk ; but ours, troth ! they'll ate um quite dry !"

We now passed a few patches of oats, as also some small fields of potatoes growing around a few stone-walled cabins, the thatched roofs of which, at intervals of about a foot, were covered with straw-ropes, at the end of each of which hung a stone, weighing about 20 lbs.

"What is all that for?" I inquired.

"To keep down the roof, yere Arnh'r, during the winds of winter," he replied.

In the low hills six miles from Westport we now passed, close on our right, a large white-washed building with sable wooden shutters that were closed. Above the door I observed a black board, on which was written in white letters,

CARREKENEDY
NATIONAL SCHOOL.

About a mile beyond this building—which, as I passed, I inwardly hailed as the best means, under Providence, of bringing together, in friendly communication, the Catholic and Protestant children of Ireland—in a spacious flat of heath and swamp, forming altogether a splendid grouse and snipe country, I observed, without spire, a white Catholic church, which, excepting one whitewashed cottage with a straw-roped roof, were the only habitations to be seen. Over the sides of the mountains on my right, as well as across the great level before me, magnificent shadows of clouds were slowly passing. On the top of a small bush, close to the solitary little white cabin, lay extended to sun and air the only emblem of animal life I could anywhere behold, a madder-red woollen petticoat.

After looking for a few seconds at the church, which, like the school-house we had just passed, ought to unite together in brotherly love the whole Christian family of Ireland,—“What do you pay your priests?” said I.

He replied, “For getting married the poorest pay from 25s. to 20s. ; those that attend give from 2s. 6d. to 1s. ; *thim* are the poorest. For baptizing a child they pay 2s. 6d., and the gossip’s name goes down after the child’s name, but the gossips pay nothing at all. At Christmas and Aister the poor people pay hum 1s. ; the shopkeepers ’ll pay hum 1l.”

After trotting for a short distance along the banks of a small rapid river, of dark, rich, tawny-coloured water, here and there breaking white over large stones, among which were, I was afterwards told, a quantity of salmon,—

“What are those for?” said I, pointing to a little potato-field, full of tall, upright sticks, on the top of several of which was affixed a peat.

“To frighten away the crows, yere Arnh’r. They take a note arf um, that they may be a marn’s hat.”

We now stopped for a few minutes to bait our horse at a small house close to the river and bridge of Errib. The kitchen I entered was, as usual, full of smoke ; and yet I was much struck with the gentle, pleasing manner of its mistress as she lighted for the driver a large match of wood that flared as if it had been soaked in spermaceti oil.

“It’s yere bog-wood,” said the driver to her, “isn’t ut?”

“Tissur !” was her answer to him.

As we drove away, “God speed ye !” said her husband to us, slightly waving his hand to us in adieu.

We now continued our course along the bank of the river, that appeared to be rushing more violently than before. On each side of us were mountains. In a little green valley stood, mourning together over the loss they had severally sustained, the stone walls and sharp

triangular gables of eight unroofed cabins. At a short distance from them appeared, as if it had just risen out of the ground, a bran-new good house.

Two little girls about fourteen years of age, with their plaids over their heads, lay together on the side of the grassy valley, and without raising an eye towards our car, which passed close to them, they continued playing at the old-fashioned English school-game of throwing into the air small stones and catching them on the back of their right hands. Not a cabin was in sight.

“ Very honest people in this country ?” said I to the driver.

“ Sure, yere Arnh’r might travel by yereself here a night. Divil a word would any man say to ye.”

At fourteen miles from Westport we came to a beautiful narrow lake, at the head of which a number of workmen were busily erecting a large substantial stone Protestant church with Gothic windows.

“ Thart’s,” said the driver, as he pointed at it with his whip, “ for what we ca’ ‘ joompers ;’ but if the pitaturs would return, they’d a’ come back. They would, indade, yere Arnh’r.”

Opposite to the church, embedded in trees, was a most beautiful retreat, called “ Ashley Lodge,” belonging to the Hon. David Plunket (brother to the Bishop of Tuam), who has lately purchased from the Marquis of Sligo the whole range of mountains for three miles. Adjoining is a similar property of about 10,000 acres, purchased, I was informed, by Captain Houston a short time ago at the rate of $2\frac{1}{2}$ *d.* an acre. I here passed on the road two or three groups of children, all, especially the girls, strikingly clean and neatly dressed. Following them at some distance was a tall, slight, intelligent gentleman, whose black clothes and white neckcloth clearly explained to me that he was a Protestant clergyman. I accordingly desired the driver to pull up, and for a few moments conversed with the Rev. Weldon Ashe, who informed me that, although the church was not yet built, his congregation amounted to 102 persons. Just as I was leaving him, I made some observation on the pleasing appearance of his children. “ We teach them cleanly habits,” he replied.

“ They were all baptized Catholics,” said my driver to me, with great energy, the instant we were alone. “ I’m as sure of ut, yere Arnh’r, as I am that I hould this whup. But, poor craters, whart could they do ?”

My attention was now engrossed by a view, immediately before us, of what appeared to be a beautiful serpentine lake, but which, in fact, was an arm of the sea, ten miles long, called Killary Harbour, dividing the counties of Mayo and Galway.

As we trotted along the shore, its only habitations appeared to be eight unroofed cabins, surrounded by a few poplar-trees and whitethorns, a good-sized old post-house, a new rival one, and the clean white barrack of the constabulary. On arriving at the latter, I entered it, desiring the driver to go to the post-house.

The little force established on this sequestered spot consisted of one constable (a Catholic) and four sub-constables (two Protestants and two Catholics), who had been here from two to four years. All were in full uniform ; the buttons of their coats and the brass plates of their waistbelts shone resplendently. The walls, which have been regularly lime-washed by them-

selves once a month, were as white as snow, and the staircase and floors of the rooms were literally as clean as an English dairy. The constable told me that the new proprietors of the country in the neighbourhood had been unroofing the cabins since 1848.

“What has become of the evicted?” I inquired.

“Some,” he replied, “have gone to America, some to England, some into the poor-house, and some are dead.”

“Have you had any disturbances here?” I asked.

“There has,” he replied, “been no outrage or crime of any sort committed here for three months;” correcting himself, he added, “when Patrick M’Anus’s wife was baten we took the two that did it, and they have both been lodged in gaol.”

“How far is *your* Catholic church off?” He replied, “Five miles.”

To my great surprise he then told me, in answer to my inquiries on the subject, that he and his little party could obtain no provisions nearer than Westport, not even potatoes! “We tried,” he said, “the other day to get one stone of them, but nobody would sell them. They say they want what they have got, or think they are failing, and that they’ll have too little for themselves. We send,” he added, “two of our party, with a horse and cart, once a month to Westport, to buy meal, flour, potatoes, bacon, fresh beef, and we then corn it. Thro’out the year we live almost entirely on salt provisions. At Christmas we buy a sheep among ourselves.”

“Whose potatoes are *those*?” said I, pointing to a plot not three yards from me, without a fence of any sort.

“They belong,” he replied, “to the hotel-keeper.”

“Why, surely,” I observed, with an astonishment I could scarcely conceal, “he would allow you a few?”

“Divil a stone, sir! For nearly three years we have not been able to buy a potato.”

Before me on the hill were amicably grazing together several sheep and cows, and as I looked at them, and reflected that the next-door neighbour of the constabulary would not allow to them a single potato out of the lot that were literally growing almost beneath their feet, I could not help muttering to myself—

“Sic vos non vobis.”

On arriving at the post-house I found playing very sweetly before it a piper, at whose feet, knitting socks, were sitting four women and three children, in old ragged red petticoats. I had never before heard the Irish bagpipe, which is played with bellows instead of by the breath, and I was particularly admiring its bass notes, when, all of a sudden, the women and girls jumped up, and, casting my eyes down the road, I saw, rocking, and reeling, and rapidly approaching me, one of Bianconi’s three-horsed cars, accompanied on each side by a swarm of girls from twelve to eighteen, all in red petticoats, and all with extended hands offering to passengers, whose knees they could touch, scarlet and white socks.

As soon as the car reached the post-house, at which it was to change horses, the arms and stockings were, if possible, more earnestly extended than before.

The passengers, who on each side of the carriage appeared closely packed together, side by side, as if for sale or exhibition, were nearly all composed of English wide-awake travelers, most of whom held in their hands a certain pea-green book. Among them, with kid gloves on her hands, with a parasol on her lap, and in a gown that modestly covered her shoes, sat a tall, lusty, finely-dressed lady, of about forty, who appeared to be the pattern of a good housewife. Every feature in her face demonstrated that she knew how to preserve, pickle, and otherwise superintend the various items that make the inside of a good home comfortable ; but she was evidently bored to death by the group of vile, naked-legged, bare-footed Irish savages that were buzzing about her. Averting and slightly tossing her head, she had already said “ La !” once ; and as that word comprehended all that could possibly be said on this subject, she very properly would neither answer them nor again even look at them. In a very few minutes the fresh horses were affixed, and away drove the car at a brisk trot, followed by its escort of red fluttering petticoats ; and certainly nothing could be wilder than the picture of the whole group following the serpentine course of the bay, until passing a small promontory it at last totally disappeared from view. The constable, who had accompanied me from his barrack, told me that these children had joined the car at two or three miles from the post-house, and after its departure usually followed it for about the same distance.

At the post-house called Leenane there was no fresh horse ; “ but,” said my driver to me, as he apprised me of the calamity, “ sure, yere Arnh’r, and I’ll not lave ye ; so I’m baiting my harse to take yere Arnh’r on.” And having thus a few minutes to spare, as the readiest mode of disposing of them, I ascended the mountain-side, which was close to the road, to a small promontory. On turning round to look at the view, I beheld before me, on the opposite side of the beautiful serpentine salt-lake beneath, stupendous hills, heatherless, but covered with green, rank, sedgy grass, which faded at the summit into grey sterile rock. On the left was Mewlrea, the highest mountain (2688 feet) in the west of Ireland. While I was slowly ascending, I had more than once, suddenly and very peremptorily, exclaimed, “ Be off with ye, you young vagabond !” to a boy of about twelve years of age, who, with a pair of bright-red socks in his hand, had, like a wolf, followed me from the road. At each angry exclamation, the boy, as I turned round upon him, stepped back, and, showing me a set of white teeth and a pair of laughing eyes, I felt I had the worst of it, until, by his pleasing manners and pretty face, he succeeded in terminating the war that had been waging between us.

“ Have you any father ?” I inquired.

“ No,” he answered ; “ he was taken up for fishing, and died in prison.”

“ Have you ever in the course of your life,” said I, looking at his ten toes, “ worn shoes ?”

“ Never, yere Arnh’r,” he replied.

“ What hurts your feet most ?” said I, thinking at the moment of the sharp macadamised road beneath us.

“ Snow !” he replied.

“ Why ?” I ignorantly asked.

“ Snow is cauld, yere Arnh’r !” replied the boy.

“ Rain is bad !” he added.

“ Why ?” I asked.

“ You take cauld out of the rain,” he replied.

“ Is hot weather bad ?”

“ No, if it wouldn't be too hot entirely.”

“ When it is too hot, what does it do ?” I asked.

“ Take some of the skin arf 'em. Sir !” he replied.

“ Don't the stones cut your feet ?”

“ Very seldom !” he replied, with a smile ; and yet, when I made him show me one of them, I was surprised to see that, excepting the heel and ball, which felt hard and springy, like India-rubber, the rest of his little foot was apparently almost as soft as if he had lived in shoes on a Brussels carpet.

As, however, I could now see that the car was ready, we descended to the post-house, and, on entering it for a moment, I found a small, nicely furnished bedroom and parlour, forming comfortable fishing quarters for any one of the numerous family of Isaac Walton who visit this neighbourhood.

As we quietly trotted along the road that, at about ten or twenty feet above it, obsequiously followed the lake, which, though here and there slightly awakened by a momentary breeze, was, generally speaking, enjoying a siesta, we were surrounded by highland scenery of magnificent description. One of the mountains, curiously scooped out, resembled the section of a volcanic crater. At its base, like a speck, was an unroofed cabin, surrounded by the ruins of little walls, apparently short hieroglyphic memoranda of its history. On taking leave of the lake, we went through a rocky pass, at the end of which there suddenly burst upon my view the distant “ Twelve Pins,” or “ Benna Beola,” of Connemara, a group or family of wild, high, bleak, barren mountains, of very striking appearance. After crossing, by a bridge, a small stream, near which was a cascade, the road conducted us through a boggy space, about two miles long and one broad, of coarse grass, completely surrounded on every side by mountainous hills of all shapes. Excepting three wild ducks that, from a small lake, rose, and then, as if spell-bound, with extended necks, continued flying in circles above it, not a living being was to be seen, or a habitation of any sort.

At last we came to a few goats grazing near an unroofed cabin, of which only one frail gable remained.

The number of unroofed houses I passed was to me a subject not only of unceasing regret, but of astonishment.

The census return of 1851, as compared with that of 1841, shows a diminution of inhabited houses in Ireland of 21 per cent. ! or, in actual numbers, there were in the former year no less than 281, 104 fewer inhabited houses than in the latter ; and, accordingly, the same return shows a diminution in the number of families of 265,785. And these figures, which very accurately confirm each other, moreover show that the 15,314 remaining families must

either have been crowded into the houses still remaining, or have taken shelter in the work-houses or towns, the latter having, it is well known, received large numbers of the rural poor, just as the former sheltered those who were wholly destitute.

It must not, however, be considered that the cabins and houses that have disappeared have *all* been levelled or unroofed by the process of eviction ; for in a very great many cases the occupiers were removed with their own consent, and, moreover, were assisted to emigrate. In many instances improving landlords have built better cottages for their tenants before throwing down the old ones.

Adjoining the ruined cabin that had so particularly attracted my attention was a small white Catholic chapel with slated roof ; and by the road-side, as its guardian angel, sat by himself, bareheaded and bare-footed, a beautiful child of about two years of age.

A mile further, near the head of Kylmore Lake, which is nearly a mile long, we suddenly drove by a Protestant schoolhouse and six comfortable cottages in a line, all building for widows and children.

“ Are all these hills in winter covered with snow ?” said I to a large, coarse, strong, bony, useful young woman, as the car trotted by her.

“ They do. Sir,” she replied.

A little further on, close to the water, I observed, surrounded by a high wall, a quadrangular line of cottages on a stony hill, constructed in 1848 for a workhouse, but now deserted.

At the head of the lake, on which there was at the moment gambolling a beautiful ripple, I observed a good hotel, and as we were trotting towards it along the road close to the water’s edge, we met a well-attired gentleman, comfortably walking with a lady leaning on each of his arms,—both dressed in silk, and both with parasols in their hands. Excepting the inn and the deserted workhouse not a habitation was to be seen. The stones at the bottom of the lake, in which there is no mud, were, near its brier-covered banks, glittering in the sun.

At the extremity of the water we passed almost under impending rocks of great beauty, the clefts in which were teeming with heather and with brushwood, composed of beech, hazel, and strong briers.

Traversing a second defile of about 100 yards in length, we burst upon another smaller lake, the perpendicular right bank of which was covered, as before, with wood, among which I observed a quantity of holly-trees growing very luxuriantly. At 8 miles from Leenane we passed a substantial house with smoking chimneys, belonging to an Englishman, Mr. Eastwood, of Liverpool, the owner of upwards of 1000 acres bordering on the lake. Here we found fields of oats, and close to the road a herd of 30 cows and a magnificent bull, all busily grazing. In the midst of them, intently knitting, there sat on the ground, in a madder-red petticoat and chequered shawl, a fine-looking Connemara girl of about 18.

From this beautiful lake ran a strong stream, which, after we had crossed it by a bridge, continued for some time alongside of the road. Before us, at a considerable distance, was a large, lofty, solitary mountain. On our right and left were low, rocky hills.

Immediately under a lofty mountain, called Molless, we suddenly burst upon the magnificent salt-water harbour of Ballynakill ; and on stopping at a small hotel beside it, a number of little girls in bright-red petticoats ran up to me.

“ Take some di'monds, yere Arnh'r !” they all exclaimed, extending at once their slight arms and small hands, in which I saw glittering a few tiny bits of white crystal.

But my attention was engrossed by a very handsome, large, well-built Protestant church immediately before me, which only a few days ago was consecrated by the Bishop of Tuam.

Its site has been most happily chosen where the winding road from Clifden to the Killeries approaches the beautiful bay of Ballynakill, in the immediate vicinity of some of the most improved parts of that romantic district. The church, on the day of its consecration, was, I was informed, densely crowded, not only by the rich, poor, and poorest classes of the surrounding country, but by thirty clergymen of the Established Church, as also by several people from England. The ceremony, ornamented by the grand mountain scenery around, was, no doubt, calculated to make a deep and lasting impression on the minds of those who witnessed it. For some time, by the skill and energy of new settlers, the surrounding waste of brown bog and heather had been converted into corn-fields and pasture, and in the midst of this placid picture there now arose a solid building in which all might assemble to invoke together the blessing of the Almighty on all sorts and conditions of men.

Nearly opposite the church stood a very fine house, built and occupied by James Ellis, Esq. (a Quaker, brother to the late member for Leicester), who has also just constructed a large and commodious school, with a suitable residence for the master. He was, moreover, the possessor of a large crop of oats on ground that last year was a bog. The principal shop-keeper, and postmaster, is also an Englishman.

As usual, I walked for information to the constabulary barrack, in which I found, in the same state of dress and discipline I have so continuously had occasion to describe, one constable (a Roman Catholic) and five sub-constables (four Roman Catholics and one Presbyterian). In the constable's room I observed ‘ The Works of Josephus,’ ‘ Smith's Wealth of Nations,’ ‘ Industrial Resources of Ireland,’ ‘ Chalmers' Discourses,’ ‘ Anecdotes of Napoleon,’ ‘ Waterton's Wanderings,’ ‘ Lamartine's History of the Girondists,’ ‘ The Edinburgh Encyclopædia,’ ‘ The Saturday Magazine,’ with several other volumes.

On my asking him what were his principal duties, he readily replied, “ Executing warrants generally, and especially for poor-laws ; arresting those who have absconded from work-houses with the clothes thereof, besides often leaving their families behind ; escorting prisoners by night and by day ; patrolling from two to four miles from the station ; going to fairs and ‘ patrons,’ on the requirement of a magistrate, where disturbances are expected ; attending quarter sessions, assizes, and at elections, if called upon.”

On asking him whence he procured provisions ? he told me that, as he and his men could obtain but little in the neighbourhood, excepting potatoes, they usually sent to Clifden for their meat and salted it.

On the side of the harbour, which, being land-locked, looks exactly like a beautiful lake, we passed a small, comfortable house built by Mr. Graham, an Englishman, and not far from it a small stone pier, at which were lying moored three boats. Further on was a large substantial residence, just completed by Captain Fletcher, of Dublin, around which were growing oats and green crops. In the surrounding heather-covered hills, the summits of which had the

soft, round appearance of those in Scotland, were to be seen here and there, lower down, patches of oats.

We now came to a house called Rockville, a property belonging to Mr. Butler (a Protestant), from Carlow. Here a beautiful English-looking village church, at the consecration of which 300 persons had lately attended, and school-house, had been newly built, and a residence for the clergyman, Mr. Lynch, is moreover in progress. In front of Mr. Butler's lawn and gardens was a small rocky eminence, on which from a slight flag-staff I saw re-velling in pure air the British Union Jack, beneath which several children were gambolling. The young plantations were thriving very luxuriantly.

After trotting by six unroofed cabins, victims to the progress of the civilization that was striding around them, the country reverted to grouse-shooting hills, which again gradually changed into a vast extent of coarse, rank, sedgy grass, in which, as the road wound its serpentine course, not a habitation was to be seen. Behind it stood the Twelve Pins, looking perfectly barren. A little further on was another beautiful salt lake, an inland branch of the sea, of which we had a distant glimpse.

We now passed a house of modern form, surrounded by crops and woods. At four miles from Clifden, towards which our tired horse was slowly trotting, the road began gradually to descend until we entered a region of heather and furze, in which the flowers of the purple loosestrife and yellow rag-weed were so blended together that they appeared to spring from the same plant.

"That's beautiful ! isn't it ?" I observed to the driver, as we came rather suddenly in sight of a fine lake.

"Very handsome, indade, Sir !" he replied.

In a solitary potato-field a stout woman, in a red petticoat and with bare ankles and feet, was stooping down digging potatoes ; as we passed close to her she raised her uncovered head, from which hung a quantity of black shaggy hair as wild as the mane of a Shetland pony. On the hill side above her I observed an animal grazing.

"Will mules," said I to the driver, pointing towards it, "eat potatoes ?"

"Oh yes !" he replied, with a grin : "they'll poke 'um up with their fate."

My friend's mouth now began to pucker up, and around each eye there gradually appeared such innumerable wrinkles of fun, that I saw I had unintentionally touched a ticklish point.

"Oh yes. Sir," he added, scarcely able to suppress laughter. "Oich ! yere Arnh'r, they're the bloodiest rogues you ever see in yere life ! They're mortal knowing, and you can niver depend on 'um. Gad ! if ye mind 'um for twinty yares, they'll some day or night all of a sudden turn on ye and give ye a kick !"

We now entered Clifden, the principal town of that western highland portion of Ireland comprehended under the local names of Jar Connaught, Connemara, and Joyce Country, the whole being usually called Connemara, a district about 34 miles long and 20 in breadth, and comprehending upwards of 20 capacious harbours fit for the reception of vessels of any burden. The best land in Connemara is comprised in the neighbourhood around the town.

Leaving my carpet-bag at the hotel at which I had ordered dinner, for it was now past six o'clock, I walked to the union workhouse (an enormous manufacturing-looking building of two rows, one behind the other, each row having twenty windows in front), situated about two hundred yards from the termination of the main street, and, as I only wanted to see its inmates, I requested the master to assemble them, at once, in their respective yards. Their numbers were as follows : —

Able-bodied men, of whom only six were really fit for work, and boys above 15	159
Able-bodied females above 15	226
Infirm	44
Boys below 15	108
Girls do	227
Nurses In hospital, &c. . . .	82
Total	846

At the entrance-gate I had observed two messenger-boys, fifteen and sixteen years of age, with unusually handsome countenances, and I was surprised to learn that “ they could get no work.” The girls below fifteen, who were dressed in blue, without hats or shoes, appeared healthy, but very small ; many of them had been in the house three or four years. The little boys below fifteen were—as I have before observed—fearfully diminutive. The women and girls above fifteen I found all standing in the yards, in a row, with their backs against the wall. Almost every one had an honest countenance, was clean, but all were barefooted. The men and boys over fifteen, who generally speaking looked weak, were dressed in clothes so old that they appeared to be on the confines of turning into rags.

The aged and infirm, principally women, formed, of course, a sad scene ; and, as my brief observations were concluded, I was not sorry to get once again into the free air.

On walking towards the inn I was surprised at the number of public buildings I could see. In front of me, inclining to the left, was Bridewell ; not far from it a comfortable house on an eminence belonging to the parish priest ; and on its right a Catholic chapel, the constabulary barrack, and, lastly, a court-house.

The town is composed of a principal street, straight, very broad, and about 120 yards in length, of houses of two and three stories high, and of another similar but curved street joining it at one end, at an angle of about 45 degrees. At the point of junction I found seated on the ground several groups of women and girls, all in red petticoats and white or striped shawls. Some wore caps, while the hair of the remainder hung loose on their shoulders, with nothing to keep it from dangling before their eyes but their ears, behind which a portion of it was more or less neatly packed or poked. Before each of them lay a quantity of fruit or dried fish in a flat basket, but, as there was not in sight a single purchaser, patiently and cheerily they sat chattering in Irish, and looking into each other's eyes, taking not the slightest notice of me, although for a few minutes I stood among them noting their appearance in my book. Close to them, with a family of weights beneath it, was a large iron triangle, in charge of a

sturdy man called a “craner,” whose official duty—in consideration of a salary of 10*l.* a-year and a small payment for each article—consisted in weighing potatoes, corn, hay, straw, &c., for the whole community. Two of the constabulary, neatly dressed, were standing beside him. At their feet sat an extremely pretty, modest-looking young woman, in a ragged red petticoat mended by, or rather composed of, patches, no one of which was as big as my hand. From her head, twisted into beautiful folds, hung an old blanket in rags and tatters. Close to her was a tiny circle of little children of about two or three years old, cheaply amusing themselves with a heap of dust. Below the street, at the end of the town, and at a considerable depth, lay a beautiful narrow lake or arm of the sea, called Ardhear Bay, on the opposite side of which green crops and oats were growing among rocks in small enclosures, bounded by dilapidated stone walls ; and about two miles distant appeared Clifden Castle, to which a quantity of landed property in the neighbourhood is attached.

On returning to the town I entered into conversation with an exceedingly intelligent English farmer, who had lately purchased land in Connemara. He told me that the strong, rank, sedgy grass, which from its luxuriance had much attracted my attention, was fit only for rough Irish cattle or brood mares ; in fact, that neither sheep nor English bullocks would touch it. And on my asking him why throughout the country I had that day passed I had scarcely seen any live stock, he explained to me that on much of the property in the neighbourhood, that had been lately purchased, there proved to be unexpected arrears of poor-rates, which the purchaser could not conveniently pay ; and, as he knew that if he stocked his land with cattle they would be seized, he allowed it, for the present, to remain without them.

The necessity for some means of facilitating the sale of encumbered estates had been apparent in Ireland for many years. The extravagant habits of the last century, the establishment of “middle-men” and of the cottier system, which converted the small tenant into a mere rent-producing animal, induced the formation of large family settlements, and thereby encouraged loans, for which estates, one after another, were mortgaged. In addition to all this, competition rents, the system of creating 40*s.* freeholders, of paying for land by labour, and the consequent result, namely, a state of barter and of low subsistence, produced altogether, early in the present century, a climax, the evil consequences of which the high prices of the war temporarily averted. At last, however, the hour of retribution arrived. Rents were necessarily diminished ; the cholera, the potato disease, and the famine consequent thereon, rendered the collection of these reduced rents impracticable ; and, first, the creation of the poor-law, and, secondly, its extension to out-door relief, produced the inevitable effects of completely breaking down not only the landlord but the system on which he had lived. Many who had long been striving to compound, or to effect a sale on fair terms, were suddenly compelled to go into the market on any terms, and no sooner were they forced into this miserable emergency than they practically experienced, most keenly, the evils that in Ireland fettered the transfer of real property.

For instance, there were lands occupied on parliamentary titles, scarcely two hundred years old, so hampered in the intricate meshes of the law that they could not pass through those of the Court of Chancery. The system of registry established in 1715 had become nearly useless, and it was therefore evident to all concerned—to buyers as well as to sellers—that nothing short of the creation by Parliament of a new court, almost as arbitrary as that (the Court of Claims) which had originally given the titles, would suffice to remove the embarrassments in which all were involved.

The benefits conferred upon Ireland, and indeed upon English and Scotch purchasers, by the Encumbered Estates Act, have proved almost incalculable.

Seven hundred and seventy-two properties, or parts of properties, have already been sold to 2335 new proprietors, for no less than 7,215,000*l.* The greater part of these sales have been so small that only ten have exceeded 20,000*l.* each. Several of the purchasers had been the tenants of the very lands on which, under the old system, they were before starving, and which they had been struggling to cultivate. Others are persons who have realised, in trade and in professional labour, fortunes they were desirous to expend on land—some are mortgagees—several English or Scotch settlers. And thus, although all must regret to see old properties broken up, old families dispersed, and ancestral mansions deserted, it cannot be denied that the unavoidable change that has been effected is highly advantageous, most especially as compared with the laws, habits, customs, and state of society it succeeded. In common justice to the unfortunate proprietors who, under the operation of the new Act, have been summarily obliged to sell, it should, however, be recollected that for the erroneous system of their forefathers—the results of circumstances rather than of guilt—they ought not to be held answerable ; that this system they had no power to alter ; and, lastly, that the blow which eventually felled them to the ground was an extraordinary dispensation of Providence—a simultaneous visitation on animal and vegetable life they could not have foreseen, and which it was utterly out of their power to avert.

The actual effect of the famine in Ireland, even merely as it regards population, it is not very easy to calculate. By the last census the population of Ireland amounted in that year to 8,175,124. Reckoning by its previous average advance, it had probably in 1845 increased to say 8,500,000 (but for this there can be only conjecture, and the computation above stated). In 1851 the population was found to have sunk to 6,515,794. In round numbers half of this diminution may, I have reason to believe, be set down to foreign emigration, 150,000 or 200,000 to immigration to England, and the remainder to a diminution of births, owing partly to the emigrants having been in the prime of life, and partly to the effects of the famine, which, although it did not actually prove fatal to as many as is usually supposed, not only forced and frightened many of those most likely to have children to emigrate (leaving behind the aged and infirm members of their families), but by poverty diminished the marriages and fecundity of those who remained.

At half-past nine o'clock at night I walked to the barrack of the constabulary, composed of one sub-inspector (a Protestant), who having just returned from a long journey was in bed, one head-constable (a Protestant), two constables (Catholics), and sixteen sub-constables, of whom thirteen were Catholics and three Protestants.

From the head-constable I ascertained that, at a cost of 2300*l.*, there had just been constructed in the town a substantial Protestant church ; and that for another, to be erected on the opposite side of the Bay, 600*l.* had already been collected. He informed me that “ no crime of importance had been committed in the neighbourhood for the last twelve months.”

A fortnight in Ireland (1852)

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