

Achill Island, Dugurt & Dooagh.

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1906

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PREFACE.

IN these pages I have simply endeavoured, however inadequately, to describe, by means of pen and lens, the West of Ireland as I myself see it.

I like exceedingly the country I write about, and also its inhabitants, and if, by this book, I can persuade others to make the acquaintance of both, my purpose is served.

As I have, during the last few years, contributed numerous articles touching more or less upon several of the places and topics mentioned in these pages to many journals in London and the provinces, should any reader fancy he or she has a dim recollection of having read something like any of the passages before, the surmise is probably correct.

I have added what is intended to serve as a fairly complete index, so that readers taking the book with them may, I trust, find it useful on their travels for quick reference.

The book is divided into Four Parts : Part I., Conneinara ; Part II., County Clare ; Part III., County Sligo ; Part IV., Achill Island.

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*July.* 1906.

Achill Island—Bog Butter—Suggested National Park—Wild Goats—Dugurt—Dooagh.

*The oldest cabin in Achill, probably in Co. Mayo, is situated close to the sea. Unlike all other Achill cottages, it has rounded corners and a pole in the centre supporting the turf roof, the only attempt at a window being a hole in the roof of about six inches diameter. The rounded shape shews the structure to belong to another and a much older time altogether. It is, in short, one of the very old "bee-hive" huts which centuries ago were common all over Ireland.*

THERE is unquestionably a tendency with many writers to exaggerate the beauties of foreign places, thereby tacitly belittling the charms of spots nearer home. Familiarity with home scenes to which we are accustomed, if it does not breed contempt, always engenders indifference.

The truth is, every landscape, every seascape, whether at home or abroad, is lovely. The same sun, which in setting seems marvellously wonderful from the summit of Tenerife's Peak, sinks to rest with just as wonderful roseate hues over Acton as seen from Hammer-smith. The sunsets at Margate are probably as beautiful as any in the world. Turner no doubt appreciated them if we do not. The stars in Norway skies, scintillating like celestial diamonds, are the same stars causing the soul to thrill within us in Scotland. The same awe-inspiring stillness of the forest's depths in Canada is the same quietness one meets with in the heart of Ireland's bogs.

Now this is not to lead up to a high “falutin” eulogy of the superlative attractions of Achill—far from it—yet it is only just and fair to say at the commencement that Achill is a place I like. It has its own charms, its peculiar idiosyncrasies of people and scenery which happen to appeal to me. Others may not be charmed with the place at all. I shall think not the worse of them for that. My pen, camera, and lenses together humbly try to present a picture of Achill as it is—as we see the largest of Ireland’s islands.

We may have introduced between us too many bright lights where others may possibly see only shadows. At any rate the picture here given of the island is the result of several years’ intimate acquaintance with the place and its inhabitants—its coast, its bays, its caves, its natural history, and, I may say as well, its sorrows and its joys.

Before the railway was extended from Westport, forty miles distant, to Achill Sound, the island of Achill—the Irish Westward Ho!—was very much isolated, and even now, though connected with the mainland, the mails are still brought to Achill from Westport in a car by road, as they were previously. The railway has only been made within the last few years, but sufficient time has elapsed to give the outside world a glimpse of the peculiarities of this most westerly spot of Ireland; and it is an island worth visiting for its old fashions, habits, customs, and costumes, and it possesses magnificent rocky, even stupendous, precipitous scenery. Each year the number of visitors slowly increases, but were the beauties of the island better known there would be a rush for it in the summer and autumn.

The line ends on the mainland at Achill Sound, where a long low bridge, opened in 1888— with a swinging centre-piece for the passage of masted vessels—is carried on to a road which runs in a westerly direction through the middle of the island. This trunk road forks into two main tracks—one to the Protestant settlement of Dugort (or Doogort, as it is sometimes spelt) on the north, and the other to Keel Bay and its neighbour, Dooagh Bay, fourteen miles distant, on the south.

From Dooagh a mountain road, ending in a grass track, takes the travellers down to Kim Bay (or Keein Bay—these Irish names have many spellings), and a branch road, shortly after leaving the Sound on the left, conducts him to the Norwegian fiord-like district of Doega.

The road stones are obtained from the shore, or from the rock out-crop which occurs occasionally in the bog. And the process of road-mending is simple. The stones are broken by the wayside into small pieces and laid on the bog with sea-sand to bind them. Steam, or even any horse or hand road-rollers are unknown. Consequently, the way is very like a long-extended and attenuated spring mattress, which yields to, and springs up again after, the passage of a vehicle, and on which even the pedestrian causes a noticeable quiver.

Horses can trot very fast and safely over these bog roads, and they seldom stumble, broken knees being rare. The whole surface of the island is bog-covered, overlaid with beautiful purple heather, but unfortunately totally devoid of trees, except for a few at Dugort and the Sound, where a plantation round a house is an agreeable variation, and where gigantic fuchsia trees, osniunda ferns, honeysuckle, and bramble bushes luxuriate; with these exceptions, bog—thick black-looking bog, when it is cut into—reigns supreme. The numerous hardened branches and large, dry, gnarled, black tree-roots which are dug out of it, however, shew that once Achill was forest-clad. These ancient, eccentric, even fantastic looking pieces of wood are used for barriers at the track-ends between the bog-draining ditches, where they join the road and prevent cattle straying, so that in treeless Achill they are now most useful.

Another product of the bogs is butter. Some persons have advanced the theory that bog-butter is a substance formed from the peat itself, but chemical analysis goes to shew that it still possesses the chief characteristics of butter—butter from the cow. The general belief is that it was placed in the bog and grown over since by vegetation. It is usually found in 20 and even in 100 lb. lumps at depths as much as 14 feet below the surface. As a rule the original shapes of these lumps are preserved. On one was seen finger-prints, on another a coarse hempen cloth was found wrapped round the butter, which crumpled to dust on exposure to the atmosphere. From the position of these finds in the Irish bogs it is generally thought that they have been there at least one thousand years. Now, why did the ancient inhabitants of Ireland place butter in large lumps in the bogs? It may be that the butter was placed there in hiding from the rapacity of the Danes or other invaders, or that the bog was an excellent storehouse, cool and antiseptic, where butter kept well. It is just possible that the environment of bog imparted a distinct and much-sought-after flavour to butter which had been thus buried.

When now taken out of the bogs dogs will eat it, and it has a greyish-white colour, with a slightly rancid smell. It contains no salt, only a trace of nitrogenous matter, and very little moisture. Bog-butter is an interesting link with the far past, at any rate.

Curiously enough the butter makers in the country districts of Ireland to-day very generally put up their butter in lumps similar in shape to those of the ancient Irish.

The following extract from Dineley's "Tour in Ireland" (*Journal of the Kilkenny and South, East of Ireland Archaeological Society*, 1885-7, p. 186) records the practice of burying butter in Charles II.'s time: "Dyets generally of the vulgar Irish are . . . Butter layd up in wicker basketts, mixed with store of [blank in original], a sort of garlick, and buried for some time in a bog, to make provision of an high tast for Lent." Sir William Petty, in his *Political Anatomy of Ireland*, makes mention of "butter made rancid by keeping in bogs." [1]

The prevailing feature of Achill is wind, chiefly south-west, and every dwelling is constructed to combat its onslaughts. But it is a soft balmy wind, most bracing in effect, making Achill a very desirable holiday resort for tired brain-workers, anæmic persons, and those wearied with city life.

Roofs have all to be tied down with straw bands, to which weighty stones are attached at the ends to withstand the onslaughts of the wind. The better-to-do inhabitants use rope instead of straw bands to keep the turf or thatch roof over their heads. Turf stacks have also similarly to be protected by stones.

There is a curious connection between Achill Sound Bridge and foxes. It is now a meritorious action, and sportsmanlike, to shoot or trap foxes in Achill, for they have so increased during the past few years as to have become a positive and universal nuisance. Until this bridge was built, connecting the mainland with the island, foxes were scarce, so rare that the head and brush of a solitary specimen were hung up in the tap-room of an inn in the island on show as a curiosity. The foxes have evidently rushed across the bridge, finding a magnificent country on the island side with innumerable caves and inaccessible precipices for their unmolested increase. So bold have they become that on almost any night they may be seen visiting the villages and the sea shore, on the prowl for stray fowl or fish offal on the strand. They regularly visit certain spots at night, and dig up sand eels for food, a locality particularly favoured by them being Kim Bay, where one night, when encamped there, we saw no less than three together. This fox increase has become such a nuisance that no poultry can ever be allowed out during the night time, and many poor women bewail the loss of geese on

the bogs even during the daytime. A cottager, who could ill afford any decrease of worldly goods, had, to my knowledge, only the remains of three geese to collect from the bog one autumn.

Hares used to be abundant all over the island, hampers full being sent away weekly ; but they have now become extremely rare, the foxes having already quite wiped them out, and the same remark applies to grouse and other game. Masters of hounds might do worse than employ some of the natives to send them regular consignments of foxes for hunting. The effect of such a demand would be immeasurably beneficial to the island. The diminution of grouse is, perhaps, more noticeable still, for very old people, who know the island, describe them as having been formerly as plentiful as the poultry in a farmyard, all over the heather-covered mountains.

The entrance to Achill Sound, on the north, is only about three hundred yards wide, and appropriately goes by the name of Bull's Mouth, for the tides there rush in and out, and appear quite mad in their fury to get through. The entrance at the south might similarly bear the same name, but to prevent confusion it does not. Achill Beg, an island—little Achill—bounds this end of the straits. The turbulence of the tide, that twice daily rushes through this narrow channel, is easily understood, for the two large bays of Black sod and Clew have to balance their waters by means of it. In fact, it is a miniature Straits of Dover, where the North Sea and the Atlantic similarly daily strike a water-balance. The Admiralty chart shews that the depth varies from six fathoms to one-quarter of a fathom, and the smaller numbers and fractions predominate, indicating that the straits are by no means easy to navigate. Skill, and a thorough knowledge of the tides, are required to navigate the straits ; but fishing-boats and hookers naturally prefer the passage of the Sound, which in a favourable wind may mean an hour to an entire day spent in rounding Achill Head. The two entrances are, in short, most dangerous, and the list of deaths from small boats and large sailing vessels, which have attempted the passage and foundered, would be a long one. On the other hand, Bull's Mouth and the quiet waters within have saved many a vessel from shipwreck in a stiff westerly gale. There are two sides to every picture.

Some time ago it was proposed—seriously I suppose—to turn Achill into a great national park, where animals could be preserved which are being exterminated, and others, which have already long since disappeared from our shores, reintroduced. I fear this delightful suggestion proceeded from those not knowing the island and its people. It was naively said the wild deer of Achill would *inter alia* be preserved. There are no wild deer in Achill. The nearest approach to them are the wild goats of Saddle Head. Then, again, wild animals require woods to shelter them. The island is wanting in trees—lamentably so. The only pretence at a wood is a plantation round one gentleman's house at Achill Sound, not far from the bridge. The idea of such a naturalist's paradise is entrancing. But the cold douche of prosaic facts often destroys pet illusions. There are no woods for forest-creatures to live and breed in. There is only bare, damp bog—everlasting bog—and the surface of the island does not even now provide enough grazing for the wretched, half-starved cows and sheep that only just manage to exist there. Further, the natives would never leave the island, and there are now about five thousand to be reckoned with. They are mostly inveterate poachers—all the Irish are—and it would be practically impossible to preserve animals or game of any kind. I am quite sorry to have to dispel the dream of an El Dorado, Achill, Natural History Preserve—I so deeply sympathize with the dreamers.

Achill Head is the portion of the island which penetrates furthest westward into the ocean, and it, in conjunction with its neighbour, Saddle Head, consists of sheer, frowning precipices, no less than two thousand feet in height, and chaotically disarranged boulders of gigantic pro-

portions, round which the Atlantic rollers fume and smoke. In Norway only have I seen cliffs to approach these Achill cliffs for grandeur. The feeling of vastness imparted is doubtless enhanced by the broad, open Atlantic in front, whose billows roar and buffet on the rocks below.

These awful precipices and slopes, some at an angle of even sixty degrees, afford a home for the only wild goats now remaining in this country. So far as is known, they roam about in three flocks, each flock from thirty to fifty strong ; and the writer recently saw one of them, through a telescope, led by a large, white, big-horned billy going over to the precipice from the cliffs above Kim Bay. In attempting to shoot them several accidents have happened and many broken bones been the result, so that the animals, luckily, are fairly safe from man's inherent exterminating instinct. The owner of this part of the island also is chary of allowing anyone to interfere with them, a determination to be applauded, and which we trust will be adhered to. Whether they are, strictly speaking, wild or only domestic goats gone wild is not known. They have been wild, very wild, from time immemorial, and history sayeth not to the contrary. At any rate they are a noticeable feature of Achill.

Curlew are very plentiful all over this west coast. They are grey in colour, with long bills, and are very shy and most difficult to shoot. When the harvest is out in the fields they become plump and fat, and are delicious when cooked before a red fire and the fat allowed to drip into bread beneath. At other seasons of the year they are not so palatable. They feed upon worms, and are very partial to the various kinds of crawly things frequenting the mud and wet, boggy ground by the shore. In the evening, when fishing up the Killaries or by the Achill shore, we frequently would notice five, seven, or twelve flying overhead from headland to headland.

Seals abound round this part of the coast, and seldom can one go out fishing without coming across numbers of the species. It is almost hopeless to shoot them in the sea, as when struck, even in a vital spot, they immediately sink, and very rarely are their bodies found. The only chance of obtaining them is to kill them on land. We have known of a pedestrian cutting off a seal's retreat when basking on a rock, and despatching it with a blow on the head from a bludgeon. But this seal does not furnish the valuable sealskin so highly prized by ladies.

Dugort, on the north of the island, and the least picturesque portion of it, is where the tourists go, there being situated three unpretentious hotels. This is the Protestant settlement of the island. The entire population, for instance, of the thickly-populated village of Dooagh is Roman Catholic, with one exception. There is a Church of Ireland clergyman at Dugort, and several slate-roofed houses, and here the handful of well-to-do residents chiefly dwell, including the justly popular hard-worked doctor, who has all Achill for his sphere of duty.

The establishment of the "Colony"—as Dugort is also called—was commenced in the year 1833 for the avowed purpose of "converting Romanists." The Minister, Mr. Nangle, set to work at this task on the 1st of August, 1834. The colony was to be supported by subscriptions and donations raised throughout the kingdom. Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall wrote of the settlement in 1842, after having visited it and gone somewhat thoroughly into its history and doings : "Such experiments as that at Achill will be made in vain ; we have shewn that here it has been a complete failure. The principles upon which it has been conducted have not been in accordance with the divine precept of 'charity,' nor has the clergyman under whose control the settlement is placed been an example of that gentle, peace-loving, and *persuasive* zeal, that 'meek and unaffected grace,' which should distinguish a humble follower of 'the Lord and Master.'" Mr. Nangle's immediate oversight of the colony was withdrawn in 1852,

though for the remainder of his life he still took an interest in the undertaking. He died in 1883 in his eighty-fourth year.

Except for a few general stores at Achill Sound, shops are unknown on the island. At Dooagh, where I have stayed in the only slate-roof cottage the place possesses, the butcher gives you a preliminary call to inquire whether you can take a portion, and, if so, which, of a sheep. Having pre-arranged for the disposal of the carcase, a sheep is killed and he brings round on horse-back, in a basket pannier, the joint or joints you bespoke. To save all difficulties of calculation he charges in a liberal Irish fashion sixpence a pound all round for meat, and weighs it with an old-fashioned steel-yard. Beef is not obtainable in Achill ; it has to be sent for to Westport, and consequently, after its forty-mile journey, is correspondingly appreciated.

The “ postman ” at Dooagh was a woman, and when she had heavy parcels to bring she generally arrived on horseback.

The natives are shy with strangers, and can scarcely be got to answer a question until they get to know you, while it is a considerable time before they take you into their confidence.

The very young children crawl about on the cabin floor, and are occasionally carried on the back in a shawl which envelops the mother when visiting the potato patch or turf stack. Rudely-shaped wooden cradles are common, and frequently a slightly older scion of the house will be seen methodically rocking the latest arrival. The love of parents for their children is pleasantly noticeable.

Such a thing as cruelty to children is unknown, and often a woman, poor in the extreme, with several children (or a “ few,” as they say), will adopt the orphan child of a neighbouring cabin. Poor as they are, and in scanty clothes, the children are happy, and it is quite refreshing to witness the merry games, such as varieties of “ kiss-in-the-ring ” and “ round about the mulberry bush,” they get up amongst themselves on the road side, ring and running games predominating. They never seem to quarrel or fight, and the little urchins, shoeless, stockingless, hatless, may be seen in odd corners round the hovels, building houses out of turf pieces, and, when the tide is out, constructing imitation cabins in sea sand. Poverty among city children is usually painful to witness, but among the Irish peasantry that feeling is never present. The happiness and cheeriness of the Irish poor is a most delightful and characteristic national trait.

In the harvesting time the young men nearly all go to Scotland and Lancashire to work as agricultural labourers, in order to earn enough to keep their families at home. From Dooagh alone some two hundred at least go yearly on this bread-winning quest, even girls from fourteen years of age having to turn out and work ; and this they do without complaining and with exemplary patience, but it is pitiable that so drastic a remedy for poverty should be necessary.

Beyond the visits to Scotland and the north-west of England for agricultural work, the natives of Achill travel very little, and even now the majority of them have never left the island. One very old fisherman, who shewed signs in his conversation of a wider grasp of problems than his neighbours, we found had once been to London—the event of his life. He had represented Achill fishery at the Fisheries Exhibition, and went over with an island curragh and the native fishing gear. When asked what arrested his attention most in London he paused, and then said, “ That railway underneath the earth was a terrible place. I went down and got lost there, I never wish to go there again.” The memory of his awful experience on the Underground will never fade from his mind. When pressed as to what he liked best he

unhesitatingly replied : “ That place where the wax people are dressed up quite real like”—a striking testimony to the far-seeing business shrewdness of the long- departed little old French lady in black satin.

A visit to Westport is, to the Achill islander, what a visit to London was from the country fifty years ago, and the height of possible dissipation is the monthly fair at the Sound, and the even greater excitement of the yearly races, horse and athletic, at Mulranny, or Mallaranny, a few miles distant, on the mainland.

Before the bridge was built scarcely any islander ventured on the toilsome journey to the mainland at all ; and the fact that the natives are beginning to move about is a hopeful sign for the future, for seeing decent ways of living and housing elsewhere will inevitably make them think and compare the same with their own homes and surroundings. The advent of more and more visitors to the island, consequent upon the railway now having reached their doors, cannot but have an advantageous effect upon them, not only as increasing the circulation of money, but also as effecting a refining influence upon their habits.

The people are terribly afraid of cancer, which they call “ the evil,” and they tell a story of an old woman on the mainland who sells a plaster for the disease at five shillings each, which, from all we gathered, must command a large sale. If the plaster, after being applied to the suspected spot for about a month, comes off with the roots of “ the evil” attached thereto, the cancer is cured. They are sensitively secretive about this marvellous old quack, as it seems that she has once been prosecuted and fined on the mainland, but the local Achill faith in her is still unimpaired.

Many curious superstitions linger here, as they do among far better educated people ; for instance, a party of fishermen were going out to fish at Achill Head an expedition, owing to the frail nature of the canoes, not lightly to be attempted but they turned back because they chanced to meet a red-haired man, that colour of hair being held unlucky in fishing. And yet fair complexions and every shade of red hair are not uncommon. White heather is held to be lucky, and the finder of a clump on the bogs generally brings a spray home, as it is considered most suitable for a present. The belief in fairies, too, has by no means died out.

Some of the children are distinctly pretty, with wondrously dark eyes and black hair, and some have that marvellously deep chestnut shade of hair so seldom seen in a state of nature, and which made some of Leighton’s pictures famous. Many of the young women one sees about Achill are undoubtedly handsome—one or two we saw would be called beauties in any country—and they have dark blue eyes, deep-red hair

“ In gloss and hue the chestnut, when the husk  
Divides three-fold to shew the fruit within”—

perfect complexions, features, figure, and carriage.

And then another charm has to be added : the voices of Achill men, women, and children are always low-pitched, softly modulated, and musical rather remarkable characteristics when one considers the open-air life they lead, and the windy, boisterous climate of their island. But hard work and open-air life soon destroy boudoir-like beauty, leaving, however, always the graceful carriage and pleasant voice.

The women’s dress of Achill consists of bodices, skirts, and shawls, hats and boots being more conspicuous by their absence. The colours affected are gorgeous. Reds of all shades,

from that associated with the Post Office to the pale, washed-out tint ; purple of the most deeply imperial to the slaty ; magentas and a colour called “ puce” are likewise in vogue, as is also a vivid royal blue. Their blankets are home-made, of wool from the mountain sheep, and “ natural wool” coloured. The woollen skirts are generally home-made, and dyed in the various and locally fashionable shades with dyes purchased in Westport. The yellows and browns and a prevalent mustard colour for the men’s homespun are obtained by boiling a lichen which grows on the rocks at Kim Bay.

On Sundays and festivals the better-to-do women wear the well-known large, cover-all, Irish cloaks, generally deep blue in colour. When going to or returning from Mass, riding on the bare back of a horse, with the legs dangling over the near side—and they sit well on the back part of the animal—they look most picturesque, though exceedingly Italian, or anything but twentieth-century English.

Round the Doega part of the island the prevailing colour of the women’s dress is of the bright, sealing-wax-red order, and when in the tillage doing husbandry an exceedingly pleasing Mulready-like aspect is added to the landscape.

Nearly every cottage has its spinning-wheel, where the white wool (and very white is Achill wool) is combed and spun. Knitting and crocheting is the employment of women and girls in their spare time.

When tending cattle on the hillside, without such an occupation very lonely indeed would they be. Homespun and knitted stockings are much worn, and it is the custom to dye the leg part mustard colour, leaving the foot in its natural wool. These foot-gear are singularly warm and impervious to water, but it is only on great occasions that any foot apparel at all is donned.

Among the men the usual promenading dress is a short waistcoat and homespun trousers. A coat is the sign of a “ wake” being on or a visit to church contemplated. The men also smoke cuddy pipes, short, stumpy, white clays, or, at home, stout, longer-stemmed ones of the same ilk. The tobacco is the blackest of black plug roll, cut up in the palm of the hand and rubbed as required, and the same strong mixture of the weed and molasses is freely chewed.

The women also at home get great and almost universal comfort from a pipe, and a present of tobacco is as much appreciated by them as by the men.

Tea is drunk till it becomes a vice. Morning, noon, and night, tea, tea, tea. It seems to be more liked after a long course of boiling, the pernicious effect of which is apparent in the prevalent indigestion. Whisky in moderation is infinitely less harmful than tea in excess or when boiled. One old man in a miserable hovel was being sustained, we found, by his sympathetic neighbours on a mixture of very black and cold tea, in which were soaked heavy, doughy lumps of soda-bread. No wonder he felt bad. Every cottage makes its own soda-bread, which, with potatoes and butter-milk, seems to be the staple food of the inhabitants.

Except at wakes, drunkenness is not prevalent, and the public-houses are very moderate in number. Doega has none, the nearest to that village being the drinking shops at Achill Sound. Whisky is usually drunk neat, water being considered an unnecessary addition. Dooagh has one well-conducted public-house, a not excessive number for the relative importance of the village.

Achill used to be famous for illicit stills. A few years before the Halls visited it in 1842 there were at least fifty at work. But the energy of the great Irish temperance reformer, Father Mathew, utterly destroyed the trade. Still even now *potheen*—for so it is termed—of a horribly raw, throat-rasping quality is not unknown.

I had one or two bottles once given to me, but-found it quite impossible to drink it, no matter how diluted with water. It was fire-water of the rankest description. I presented it to an old coastguard in England. He was delighted with the gift, said it was worth drinking for he could taste it ! He happened to be an Irishman, so perhaps it may also have recalled pleasant memories.

The wakes, with the terrible *keen*, are still kept up at Achill, and, as we have said, the sad attempt to drown sorrow in drink I have often seen. Men staggering out of a hovel with a coffin on their shoulders, and then almost fighting as to how it shall be placed on the side-car, another man with a wisp of straw bespattering the crowd around with holy water, or as likely as not simply beating the air—all more or less half-seas over. These are pictures I retain in my mind of funerals in Achill. Unfortunately funeral customs, like marriage customs, die hard.

Dooagh is a very quiet, delightfully sleepy village. In many ways it recalls a high-up Himalaya hamlet, a nestling encirclement of tillage in square patches, chiefly of rye, with deep drains between, around the cluster of primitive huts ; prowling dogs with a common similarity of strain and containing a distinct dash of the collie ; ducks, geese, pigs, and cattle straying along the roads. But Dooagh has the sea in the form of a bay on the south, where the rollers of the Atlantic in long sweeping laps occasionally prevent all fishing from the frail, canvas-covered, and tarred canoes. Achill is the most westerly island of any size in Ireland, and Dooagh its most westerly village, so that Dooagh is the nearest village to America in the British Isles.

The place has one great want : a small pier or landing-stage running some fifty or one hundred yards into the sea is imperatively needed, so that boats could put out to sea when there is a surf on, which is frequently the case. At present, however moderate the sea may be at a little distance from the shore, access thereto is frequently prohibited by the long edging surf of the heavy rollers. Were such an inexpensive storm-wall made by the Congested Districts Board for Ireland, clincher-built boats could be used and the fishing of the village, now of the most spasmodic and desultory character, could be developed into an important industry.

At Dugort, on the north of the island, where there is no fishing of any importance, a concrete pier has been made by the Board, which is most useful for pleasure boating, enabling the residents at that side of the island to keep proper strong boats. The intention of the Board was, or ought to have been, not pleasure but business.

At Keel, too, an elaborate and expensive concreted small harbour has been constructed (it cost £1849), which at low tide is waterless, so that it is useless for harbour purposes. However, it is “ just a grand trap,” as the natives say, for seaweed ; and the islanders go there for loads of it for top-dressing their plots of land. In fact, the position of the landing-places and harbours of Achill shews that the personal influence of interested individuals, rather than the real need of the inhabitants, has led to their location and construction. It is probably correct to say that not one of these harbours has ever had landed in it a cargo of fish ; they are all at the wrong spots.

It was simply deplorable recently when, in consequence of the want of a storm-wall or landing-stage, in one evening alone out of a huge mass of herrings, at any rate more than 100,000, in the nets at Kim Bay, only at the most 40,000 were actually saved, and most of these in a broken and damaged condition. To deal with this valuable haul only frail canoes could be used, the absence of a landing-stage at Kim or Dooagh prohibiting the use of larger boats.

It is to be devoutly hoped that in future the Congested Districts Board for Ireland will consult those who know from practical experience the actual peculiarities of the tides round the shores, and the places where fish can best be caught and landed. The members of the Board are well and loyally intentioned, but it would be well if they left less to their officials and more frequently visited, unaccompanied by their officials, the outlying parts of their districts.

The idea of this Board for Ireland was a grand conception. It was to do great things. It was to enlarge holdings so that the actual occupiers could find sufficient means for comfortable and honourable existence on the land ; it was to aid migration, where necessary, in order to effect this ; it was to provide harbours and landing-stages for the promotion of fishery ; it was to improve the breed of horses ; and it was to do a host of other equally good and needed things for the congested districts of Ireland out of the public money. It may have performed all these functions in some districts of Ireland, but it certainly has not in Achill.

The climate of Achill, says Dr. Edgar Flinn (in *Ireland, its Health Resorts and Watering-Places*), “ offers-particular advantages to the invalid community. It has a fine bracing and exhilarating atmosphere, and the bathing facilities are remarkably good.” The charts in Dr. Flinn’s work shew that while the average temperature of Achill differs little from that of places as far south as Cork, it has considerable advantages in its relative freedom from excessive moisture. North-west Donegal and West Kerry (which includes Killarney) fall within areas of maximum rainfall, *i.e.*, from 60 to 80 inches per annum. Achill is put down as averaging 40 to 60 inches, or less than some of the popular health resorts in England.

When it does rain, it does rain in Achill, there is no mistake but continuous rain which prevents one getting about is uncommon.

### Achill Island Dooagh

THE majority of the rude huts or cabins composing Dooagh lie in a cluster on the right bank of a bubbling trout stream, near its entrance over the rocks into the sea. They seemed at some time, very long ago, to have been promiscuously thrown out of a gigantic pepper-box on the strand, so extraordinary higgledy-piggledy placed are they. Being all of a similar singular style of architecture and size, it is not easy to find one’s way about amongst them.

The poorest people of Dooagh live here, and abjectly poor some of them are. One old woman, for instance, of probably ninety years at least, lay a huddled-up mass of rags on one side of the hearth on the earth floor. Neighbours had given her a few pieces of turf for the fire. Rheumatic swellings the size of lemons on each wrist shewed how the poor soul for years had suffered and become incapable. On a rickety table a few bits of crockery, broken and cracked, without a vestige of food, were eloquent of destitution. In her windowless and black, smoke-dried loneliness, without an animal or bird of any kind, the old soul was dependent upon the visits of her neighbours for a drink of water or a few potatoes. In an incessant torrent of mumbling accents she called down blessings from heaven and all the saints upon her visitors who tried to impart a little temporary amelioration into her life. This old woman is known as a “ bad case,” a description the neighbours have no scruple in using be-

fore her face, and she is in receipt of the magnificent sum of one shilling a week from the parish. We paid her many surprise visits, and hardly ever saw any food in the shanty which a respectable Berkshire pig would not turn his nose up at.

But this "bad case" is not singular. An old man in rags, and a similar hovel, close by, living quite alone, when presented with some clothing, used a form of blessing of a novel character that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The unexpected magnificent gift must have upset him ! The present of an old waistcoat to another native produced the softly-repeated expression of evidently genuine delight, "By gum ! by gum !"

The readiness to bless upon any little gift being received is not an unpleasant trait in the character of the Achill Islanders. Generally common forms are, "The Lord spare thee, give thee long life, and send thee safe in all thy journeys," and the shorter form of "The Lord spare thee the health ;" while a noticeable variation is, "He that brought Peter out of prison, and saved Jonah from the whale's belly, save your soul." Achill Islanders lack not originality!

As soon as the noon has passed, the casual, courteous greeting is always "Good evening !" shewing a precision we are unaccustomed to in England. A wet day is frequently dubbed a "nice saft day," thereby implying a pleasing-and pious belief that all that is is for the best. Being vaccinated is singularly spoken of as "being cut for smallpox," a delightfully Irish way of putting it.

One evening at Dooagh we went to some out-of-the-way cabins to distribute tea and clothes to a few of the poorest people, and in particular called upon one old, solitary man whom we knew was not too much loaded down with this world's goods. We found the door of his shanty closed on the outside with latch and padlock, and naturally supposed the occupier was from home. So we took the padlock out of the clasp, it not being locked, and opened the door in order to place a little present inside. To our surprise he was in bed, and was extremely gratified with the gift we brought, praying Heaven and all the saints to reward the donors, and on our leaving he called out after us to be sure and lock the door on the out-side. The latch could not possibly be opened from the inside, so the old gentleman evidently depended upon passers-by to lock him in at night and to let him out in the morning, a domestic arrangement of some singularity and also trustfulness.

The hovels or cabins are built of rough beach stones, chipped it may be a little on the exterior, and the roofs are made of sods, locally called "scraws," which, when in position, are dried by blocking up the chimney, or oftener the hole in the roof, and door, and lighting a turf fire inside. These roofs can never be said to be water-tight. Many cabins are devoid of windows, and naturally the floor is as mother earth made it, a luxury being a sprinkling of sea-sand. The average inside measurement is about 30 by 15 feet, and the height to the beams is roughly 6 feet or less. At one end is the spot on the floor where the turf fire is always kept alight, and the other is the night-abiding place for a mixed collection of animal and bird life, that is, in the cabins of those comparatively wealthy enough to possess them. At one side of the dwelling, on a table or rack, are the few eating utensils, opposite which is the bed (only one), usually covered with home-made blankets. A small loft is sometimes constructed above the heads of the cattle for storing fodder and any tools the family may fortunately possess, and where at night cocks and hens find pleasant roosting. A small potato patch, or none, around their miserable huts, with the few pounds won by the bread-winners' harvesting in Scotland or the North of England, constitute in the majority of cases the whole means of subsistence. And when the bread-winner dies, the family, generally in such cases a large one, is solely dependent upon the charity of the neighbouring huts, which is, however, as I know, singularly and instructively generous. From one small hut of rude beach-stones, with turf

("sod") roof, kept down by hay bands or ropes with slung stones, I have repeatedly seen issue in early morning a dozen geese, several hens, a cow and calf, a horse and colt, one or two pigs, two or more toddling youngsters, one or two youths and maidens, and the father and mother. All had passed the night in a single by no means large room, without window, with an open fireplace and with close-shut door, and containing one bed. The animals are then ushered off by the various members of the family to their respective walks on the bog, and the night droppings are brought out by the shovelful by the father or eldest boy or girl and deposited on the heap close to the door. Sad all this, of course, but it is unfortunately literally true.

Some cottagers are too poor to have more than fowls or geese ; others, again, have only pigs ; some are so poor as to possess no live stock at all, and so on.

Abject poverty and the most picturesque and artistic rags I ever saw are the unfortunate rule at Dooagh. One old man came. He did not want any clothing, but asked for an old hat. That was the summit of his ambition.

We annually send abroad large sums to convert and clothe heathen who are not subjects of the King, when something very like the indisputably genuine empire article in every respect can be obtained much nearer home.

The floor of the Achill cabin, as has been said, is simply earth, with, maybe, a sprinkling of sea-sand, which is brought up from the shore in basket panniers on horses' or donkeys' backs, and frequently on women's. These panniers have a trap-door arrangement on the bottom, which falls down on hinges when a wooden pin is released. The sea-sand is also used for bedding the animals at the "farmyard" end of the cabins.

Personal washing appliances, such as jugs and basins and sanitary arrangements, are not fashionable, at least they are like the first editions of evening newspapers never seen, and we have never had the luck to see a native taking a voluntary sea bath. In the few slated homes such luxuries might be found, but we are speaking of the great mass of ordinary Achill cabins. The domestic utensils are of the simplest description and smallest number. Some of the poorer cabins possess nothing worthy of the name of furniture, and nothing in the way of crockery but what would in England be associated with a dust heap.

Small hand corn-grinding mills or querns are still to be seen in some of the cabins, but they are now merely mementoes of the days when the oats or rye was ground at home and made into bread. Nowadays, wheat flour is bought and bread made by mixing it with buttermilk, which supplies the acid, and adding a little carbonate of soda, the resulting carbonic acid gas liberated in the dough causing the bread to rise when baked on a griddle, or even a hot stone. This "soda-bread," as it is called, is made in large circular pieces of about a foot in diameter and an inch thick, and when properly made, without an excess of the carbonate of soda, is exceedingly palatable.

The fire is built up of pieces of turf on the floor, and is never allowed to go out, a pleasant red glow being soon obtained by arranging the pieces in a pyramidal slanting position, and stooping down and gently blowing with the mouth.

The door is usually built facing the east. Some of the slightly better huts have two doors, one also facing due west. The doors seldom face seaward, for the prevailing wind is south-west, and Achill is all the year round a very windy place.

The few attempts at trees, elders, and fuchsia bushes, in the most sheltered spots inland, are all weather-beaten, depressed, and worn down on the south-west. In consequence of the winds the roof has to be tied down with ropes or bands of straw, to which heavy stones are attached, and if in a particularly exposed position an extra wall of large stones has to be built up against the gable ends. The stack of turf, the universal close companion of every cabin, has also to have large stones placed round the base to prevent the pieces being blown away.

A few slate roofs are making their appearance in Achill ; there are now two in Dooagh for instance, and, sad to relate, inartistic corrugated iron roofing is being introduced. The railway to Achill Sound, a blessing no-doubt, is responsible for the advent of several inartistic novelties.

For tillage purposes and potato-growing deep ditches are cut to drain off the water, and the intervening strips of dry bog are used for pedestrians and animal walks. The ends of these, where they abut at right angles to a road, are blocked up to prevent cattle straying or entering from the roadside, with an endless variety of gate substitutes. A properly-made gate hardly exists in Achill. Within a radius of a quarter of a mile at Dooagh may be seen a dozen varieties of these comic gates. An old basket horse-pannier, whose proper function in life had been to carry up fish from the shore, or bring turf home from the bog, is placed on one side with a stone or two in front and a piece of wood-wreckage across the top of the gap ; an old barrel wedged into the wall between two pieces of odd-sized wood ; an old cart-wheel, with remains of the brilliant red paint so much affected by the islanders still visible ; an old barrow, wheel-less, turned up with the two handles stretched up appealingly against the sky- line, outlined with stones, and held in position by a transverse piece of an old ship's rib ; plenty of weird, gnarled pieces of bogwood and tree roots taken out of the bog, which, in the early dusk, take on themselves extra-ordinary likenesses to strange, contorted, and ghostly-looking animals. For the passage of a cow or other animal these remarkable structures are taken down and reconstructed afterwards a matter of time, but then time does not count for much in Achill.

[1] See *Notes and Queries*, May 26, 1906, p. 416.

Connemara and the neighboring spots of beauty and interest... with remarks on sea and fresh water fishing, Irish character, Archaeology, Botany, etc. (1906)

Author: Stone, J. Harris (John Harris)

Subject: Connemara (Ireland) -- Description and travel

Publisher: London : Health Resort publishing Co.

Language: English

Digitizing sponsor: MSN

Book contributor: University of California Libraries

Collection: cdl; americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/connemaraneighbo00stoniala>

Edited and uploaded to [www.aughty.org](http://www.aughty.org)

October 18 2011