

Arrival at Westport 1835

A tour round Ireland, through the sea-coast counties, in the autumn of 1835

John Barrow

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In submitting to the Public a brief account of a Tour made last autumn through the sea-coast counties of Ireland, I may state that the object of my visit was chiefly to see as much of the oft-proclaimed physical beauties,—the surpassing verdure of surface and fertility of soil—the lakes and mountains—the cultivated and embellished landscapes of the “ Emerald Isle,”—as a limited period of time would afford me the means of doing ; at the same time to take a passing glance at the general and external appearance and condition of the great mass of the population. Beyond these points I was well aware that want of time would make it impossible for me, on the present occasion, to go a single step.

I have avoided—as much as it is possible in Ireland to avoid—the all-engrossing topics of Religion and Politics, the difficulty of doing which is increased since they have become so intimately intermixed. For the one, I trust I shall always feel a proper respect, whatever the creed of its professors may be—Christian, Jew, or Mahomedan—provided they act up to the precepts of the religion they profess, and do not convert it into an engine of dissension and oppression : but if the Ministers of the Christian Religion, be they Protestant or Papist, degrade themselves into political partisans—if they prostitute their sacred functions to such unworthy and inconsistent purposes, and desecrate their temples into theatres for the display of their political animosities, and their altars for the denunciation of those who may differ from, or displease them, they render themselves, in my opinion, fit objects for public censure and animadversion.

With regard to Politics, the thorough dislike I have to engage in party discussions anywhere will secure me against coming in collision with conflicting parties in Ireland.—being equally indifferent as to Whig or Tory. I have my feelings both as regards Religion and Politics, and probably feel as warmly on both, as young men are generally apt to do ; but however difficult it may be, particularly in Ireland, to restrain those feelings. I trust it will not be found that, in any statement of facts or opinions made herein, I have transgressed the bounds of propriety.

I have been induced to preserve the form of letters, the substance of which were, in point of fact, written to my family from notes made daily in the progress of my tour : much, of course, has been omitted from, and more, perhaps, added to, the original letters, to render them better suited to the public eye.

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The Post-Office—Visit to Mount Browne—the Inn of Westport—Lord Sligo’s Demesne—*Extempore* preaching—Lord Sligo’s Mansion and Park—Miserable Hovels—Excursion to the summit of Croagh Patrick—View from thence—Bob of the Reek—Representations of Famine and Disease not always accurate—Mission of Sir John Hill to afford Relief to the Poor of Mayo and Galway—Wretched System of Land-letting—Miserable State of the Peasantry in consequence thereof—Deplorable Condition of the Labourers—their Hovels.

After my arrival at Westport, the first visit I made was to the post-office, where I had the gratification to receive all your letters, and those of introduction which accompanied them ; but I am afraid most of the latter will share the fate of those I carried with me from London,

of which I have thus far made little or no use. Much as I should wish to avail myself of the advantage which I am aware would be derived from frequent intercourse with Irish noblemen and gentlemen, whose kindness and hospitality to strangers are proverbial ; yet I know that the consequence of such indulgences would occasion a delay, that would entirely frustrate the plan and execution of a tour I have laid out, and which must be accomplished within a certain time. I have already, on two or three occasions, lost time by deviating from my direct road, and not finding the gentlemen at home to whom I was the bearer of introductory letters. Pray, therefore, do not trouble yourself to procure or send me any more, having already in my possession a greater number than I see the least prospect of delivering.

One of your letters to me has, however, accidentally been the means of introducing me to a very valuable acquaintance. A gentleman, calling at the post-office for his letters, mistook the name of Barrow on the address for Browne and, breaking open the seal, found that it was not intended for him ; but, observing to the postmaster that, he knew the person to whom it was addressed, or some of his family, he left with him a message, that he should be very happy to see me at Mount Browne, about two miles from Westport, when I should make my appearance there. I had made up my mind, however, not to accept the invitation, for the reasons above stated. The next day (being Sunday) I attended church, where, on Mr. Browne being pointed out to me, I thought it right to introduce myself, and thank him for the civility of his kind invitation. He now again repeated it, and pressed me so strongly to go and dine with him the following day, that I deemed it proper to accept.

Accordingly I took a car to convey me to Mount Browne, and had a very pleasant *tête-à-tête* with Mr. and Mrs. Browne, who were quite alone ; and I leave you to judge how interesting this visit must have been, to me at least, when I tell you that I did not get away till midnight.

I need not say how much valuable information I obtained from a person of Mr. Browne's intelligence and knowledge of the country, On mentioning to him my intention to visit Connamara, he kindly gave me a letter of introduction to Mr. Martin of Ballynahinch, whose father was generally known as ' Dick Martin of Galway,'—and also one to the Dean Mahon, the only two gentlemen proprietors between Oughterarde and Ballynahinch.

I told you in my last letter that I would give you some account of Mrs. Robinsons excellent hotel at Westport ; and as it is altogether different from, and far superior to, any I have seen in Ireland, I need make no apology for speaking of it. What suites of apartments it may boast of for the accommodation of families, I know not ; but, from the great extent of the building, and from the excellent rooms for the reception of single gentlemen, I have no doubt of its possessing every required convenience. *My* apartment was of course the coffee-room, but it was as unlike what these generally are as it is possible to conceive. It was, in all respects, well and handsomely furnished, and the walls hung round with a collection of good paintings, such as would be considered an ornament to any gentleman's drawing-room. There was, besides, a pianoforte in the room, and everything wore the appearance of a private dwelling. I was informed that the family who reside in it have it rent free ; that it was built and furnished by Lord Sligo ; and that the only return he requires of them is, that the guests shall be treated with attention, and the charges be moderate ; and I must do them the justice to say, that I found the conditions fully acted up to in both respects. The attendance was good, and the "culinary department" in all its branches, as far as my experience went, well conducted. I have no hesitation in pronouncing Mrs. Robinson's hotel at Westport to be one, where the most fastidious could scarcely fail to be pleased, unless indeed he chanced to be of one of those unhappy dispositions which are never pleased at anything.

The situation of the hotel is one not of its least attractions : it is very near to the gates of Lord Sligo's park, the entrance to which is at the end of the main street ; and through the

middle of this street flows a clear transparent stream of water, banked in on both sides by quays, on which are planted rows of trees, bearing a close resemblance to a street in a Dutch town, with this exception however, that the houses want the height and gable-ends, and the walls are white, instead of being red ; the water, too, is in a very different state, being in rapid motion and beautifully clear, instead of that olive-green which marks a stagnant Dutch canal.

My first ramble on the morning following my arrival was into Lord Sligo's domain ; and, being Sunday, I attended service in the little church, the only Protestant one in the place, which stands in his lordship's grounds, situated in the midst of trees. Before the regular service began, the church was full of children, receiving religious instruction under the superintendence of the clergyman, who appeared to be very zealous in the performance of this duty. The service is, of course, or rather ought to be, the same as ours ; but this is not always the case ; and I observed that here the congregation neither stand up nor sit down, according to the directions of the Rubric ; but, what is of much more importance, some of those *extempore* preachers, who are generally called Evangelical, make no ceremony in omitting such passages in the service as may not suit their taste,—a flagrant instance of which is mentioned by the right-minded and intelligent author of the “ Angler in Ireland,” where the very clergyman who read the service in the cathedral church of Tuam, in presence of the venerable Arch-bishop, “ totally omitted the prayers for the Lord Lieutenant, for the Parliament, and for the Queen ; and also would not call his Majesty religious and gracious ;” and he adds an opinion, to which I fully subscribe, “ thus to mutilate the appointed Liturgy of the Church, of which he was a public minister, in the presence of his diocesan was, I thought, *un peu trop fort.*”

In the church of Westport a collection was made before the sermon, as usual, for the poor, and not at the door, as with us. I hope you will not think that I am treating the subject with levity, when I describe to you the tray, in which the money is generally collected throughout the churches, as bearing a close resemblance to a warming-pan, thrust into the pew—the readiest mode, I admit, that could be adopted, though it looks odd to a stranger.

The sermon here was delivered, as I believe it mostly is in Ireland, *extempore* ; it was certainly very impressive, but not altogether such as I have been accustomed to, or such as, for my own part, I much admire. It is not that I object to it as being what is generally termed Evangelical, but because in this kind of preaching there always are and must be frequent repetitions, and sometimes what appear to be little short of contradictions. An *extempore* discourse is always delivered with much energy and earnestness, and no doubt would have great weight upon the minds of the lower class in Ireland ; but I don't believe that the very best of them, if printed as delivered, would *read*. On the present occasion I certainly could not but admire the earnest sincerity and zeal of the clergyman, who was a man highly re-spected and beloved in the neighbourhood.

I had endeavoured in the morning to obtain an entrance into Lord Sligo's mansion, but was informed that no one was allowed to go over the house on Sundays. Upon the steps of the door stood a poor beggar in very rags and tatters, such as are rarely to be seen even in the lowest state of destitution in England ; but in Ireland, alas ! are common enough. One or two of these miserable objects may frequently be observed at the threshold of the stately mansions, waiting to receive the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table, or whatever the housekeeper may be charitably disposed to give them.

The service being ended, the influence of Mr. Browne gained me admittance to the house. The entrance-hall is spacious, and there was in it a very curious old Spanish gun, which had been picked up off the island called Innis-Bofin, situated at a short distance from the entrance to the Killery Harbour. It had undoubtedly belonged to one of the vessels of the Spanish Armada that were wrecked on different parts of the coast of Ireland, and some of them not far

from the neighbouring shores of Connaught. A noble pair of antlers of the *Cervus Megaceros*, the fossil deer of Ireland, decorated the hall : these antlers were said to have been found on the estate, but are common enough in many parts of Ireland. In one other nobleman's mansion (I think the Earl of Enniskillen's) I saw a similar pair in the hall ; but at Dublin, I find from a little pamphlet, there is an entire skeleton of this noble creature. There was little in the house to attract attention, and, as the family were not resident, all was in disorder ; but I was greatly pleased with the collection of paintings which, though small, was valuable. There was a portrait of Lord Howe, painted by Gainsborough, which is considered one of the best of that artist in the line of portraiture ; and there were one or two other pictures by the same artist. I also observed one of Rubens, and two or three of Canaletti, and other specimens of celebrated painters.

There are some noble trees in Lord Sligo's park, and much seems to have been done, by artificial means, to produce cascades and cataracts in the little river which flows through it, and opens out into a large piece of water or lake, which is again contracted at the further end next to the bay. It answers the double purpose of embellishing the grounds, and as a canal for the conveyance of shelly-sand, sea-weed, limestone gravel, and other articles for agricultural purposes, and for returning the produce of the estate to the shipping-place at the head of the Bay of Westport. I am no great admirer of these artificial waterworks, and would rather see the river flowing uninterruptedly through the grounds in its natural bed, than see it forced up so as to form a lake, or its level raised by means of wooden dams and the insertion of troughs and water-spouts, to give it the appearance of a cascade. I understand Lord Sligo's farms are in a good state of cultivation, and the land productive. The late Lord was said to be a humane and liberal landlord ; he gave long leases at moderate rents, and the result is obvious.

I walked down to the quay, about a mile from the town, and quite at the extremity of Lord Sligo's grounds. It is a solid and well-finished piece of work, running out, like a jetty or pier, into the sea not less than a quarter of a mile in length. Vessels of two or three hundred tons are able to approach close to the quay, but none of a greater draught of water. The approach to the little inner harbour is difficult, on account of the multitude of rocks and islands which fill Clew Bay, and which I was more than once very gravely informed amounted exactly to three hundred and sixty-five, that being apparently the usual noun of multitude when nothing distinct is known. I had here the pleasure of making an acquaintance with Captain Shallard, chief officer of the Coast-guard Service. In taking a drive in his car to the foot of the Reek (as Croagh Patrick is familiarly called), we passed some of the most miserable hovels that I have yet seen, even in the flats of Mayo,—so bad that, without having convinced myself of the fact, I should scarcely have supposed them to be habitations of human beings, but rather as sheds for the cattle, the more certainly so, had I seen the head of a cow, or some other four-footed beast, peeping out of the doorway, which I understand is no uncommon occurrence. Many of these cabins are built of stones, loosely heaped together, with no window ; and the only place for the light to come in at, and the smoke to go out, is through a small hole in the miserably-thatched and sometimes *sodded* roof, at all times pervious to the rain, and through the doorway. No picture drawn by the pencil—none by the pen—can possibly convey an idea of the sad reality. The inmates, as may be supposed, are wretchedly clad in rags and tatters, and the children almost in a state of nudity.

A visit to the summit of Croagh Patrick was irresistible, and I considered myself fortunate in prevailing on Captain Shallard to accompany me on this expedition. You will, perhaps, remember that this is the same officer who so gallantly opposed and, by his determined conduct, defeated a large party of smugglers in their attempt to force a landing of contraband goods on the coast of Sussex, on the night of the 12th of November, 1831, when during his walk he fell in with them, and was cowardly deserted by the only two of the blockade men who happened to be with him, and who ran away, probably thinking, with honest Jack Falstaff, that

“ Discretion is the better part of valour.”

Captain Shallard defended himself manfully, but was of course overpowered, being so wounded with sabre cuts across the head, and having received such violent bruises in different parts of his body, that he was left on the ground as dead ; not, however, before he had severely wounded some of his antagonists, and is supposed to have killed one of their number, whose body was carried away before the morning. For this gallant conduct, the Admiralty, you will remember, gave Captain Shallard his promotion.

The morning turned out most unpropitious for our ascent ; it rained incessantly, and threatened a continuance throughout the day. It was just that sort of weather which is almost daily expected here at this season of the year. This, indeed, is pretty much the case on all western coasts. On the west of England wet weather is proverbial ; on the west coast of Norway, when I crossed the several inlets of the sea in the summer of 1833, it rained almost incessantly ; and I was there told that they seldom experienced a fair day in the autumn. But the west coast of Ireland, exposed as it is to the direct influence of the westerly and south-westerly winds that blow across the Atlantic, is perhaps subject to more wet weather than most other coasts. Thus, Lieutenant Wolfe on Lough Erne experienced, in July, nineteen days of rain ; in September twenty-two days ; in October twenty-two days ; to which may be added, at least two days more on the mountains of the coast, where it commences and continues at least a day sooner and a day later than in the interior. These mountains condense the vapours taken up on the sea, arrest the clouds already formed on the broad Atlantic, and pour a deluge of rain on the neighbouring country.

Towards mid-day the weather began to improve ; and as there was every chance of a fine afternoon, we started off in a car as far as to the foot of the Reek, the weather still improving ; the sun was, in fact, occasionally out, and the summit of the mountain free from clouds or mists ; but the flying clouds in the atmosphere cast a succession of “ gleams and glooms” across the broad sides of Croagh Patrick, which not a little added to its grandeur.

Having procured a guide, who emerged from a small *shibeen* or whiskey-shop at the foot of the mountain, we commenced our arduous ascent, somewhat vigorously on the outset, but were soon reminded that—

“ To climb steep hills requires slow pace at first.”

It was one o'clock when we began to ascend, and it took an hour and a half to reach the summit, the height of which is ascertained to be two thousand five hundred and thirty feet. The path is well marked out along the side of a ravine. On arriving at the summit we found a poor woman, barefooted and barelegged, her clothing coarse and scanty, trudging seven times round the outer edge of the level summit, which is about an acre, strewed over with small sharp stones, telling her beads as she hopped along. I happened to be the first to reach the top, and the poor soul stopped short and, looking hard at me, as if wondering what had brought me up there, exclaimed, “ God save you, Sir !” Besides the old woman there were two stray sheep on the summit of Croagh Patrick, who had selected a very bad pasture, as there was not a blade of grass, so that they too were performing penance as well as the poor woman.

The two grand days for Croagh Patrick are the annual *Pattern* day, (quære patron?) for which I was just one week too late, and Garlic Friday, as it was termed by my informant. The last is the principal one, and on that day thousands are said to flock hither from all parts of Ireland, where they flatter themselves, I suppose, that by the loss of a little blood from the feet and knees, and the mumbling over a certain number of *paternosters* and *ave-marias*, they gain the goodwill of the saint—wipe off all old scores, and begin afresh. “ I suppose,” I re-

marked to the guide, “ many of them get. gloriously drunk after they have performed their stations.” “ Och, by my *sowl* they do, Sir !” was the reply.

I much regretted not to have been here on the Pattern day, when I am told it is a very extraordinary sight to see the poor creatures winding their way up the mountain ; many of them, old and infirm, crawl round the summit once on their bare knees, or, if they prefer walking on the bare feet, seven times—in both cases over the sharp stones and broken bottles (the remnants of jovial parties) which form the pathway. I was told by a gentleman at Westport that, on viewing the mountain from thence on such a day, it appears as if the whole side of it were in motion, though too distant to distinguish the objects with the naked eye.

The top of Croagh Patrick is of an oval shape. It is flat and, as I said, may perhaps contain about an acre of level ground, although, when viewed from the bottom, it appears to come quite to a peak. The cone itself is composed of loose stones, on which little or no heath or grass seems to grow. On the summit, heaps of stones have been piled up in different places, to serve, probably, the double purpose of altars and sheltering spots from the wind ; they are of three sides, open at the top and in front. Under the lee of one of these we took our lunch. These stones are chiefly of quartz, mica slate, and serpentine.

It happened on my first reaching the summit to be very fine and clear, and I enjoyed an extensive and beautiful panorama. On the north rose the majestic Nephin, of two thousand seven hundred feet in height, with its branching offsets, and its *little* namesake, the Nephin *beg*. On the north-west was seen the noble headland of Achill, braving the Atlantic wave, and in the same direction the three hundred and sixty-five islands scattered over Clew Bay, at the mouth of which stands the large Clare island, like “ a sentinel watching over the rest.” Immediately before me, on the bold promontory that lies between Westport and the Killeries in Connamara, were the towering mountains of Furnmagan and Muilrea—the former of the height of two thousand five hundred and sixty, and the latter two thousand seven hundred and thirty-three feet.

The wind was very bleak on the summit, and a cloud came suddenly over us, producing a thick mist or fog, which in a moment completely obscured the splendid panorama we had just been enjoying ; but it passed over without any fall of rain. We descended by the opposite side to that which we went up, as this was the invariable practice, by the guide’s information, but wherefore he could not tell us.

I had heard much of one *Bob of the Reek*, as he was familiarly called, who is said to have lived for the space of fourteen years at the summit of Croagh Patrick (where he now lies buried), having, as some assert, been first excommunicated, and then sentenced by the Church to pass the remainder of his life in this airy situation, while others will tell you that he was a man of weak mind (of this there cannot be a doubt in either case) and condemned himself in expiation of some crime, known only to himself, to this high estate. His residence was pointed out, but it was in so dilapidated a state, as scarcely to be distinguished from the rest of the several recesses of which I have spoken. I have conversed with those who were personally acquainted with poor Bob. They all describe him to have been a cheerful little man, and that he wore a long beard. He used occasionally to come into the town, but not often.

This mountain is held in great veneration, perhaps more so than any other in all Ireland. I was duly assured that St. Patrick gave himself the trouble to ascend the Reek, ever since which it has taken the name of Croagh Patrick—that from this elevation stretching out his hand, he blessed the surrounding country ; and, it is added, that it was in this spot the Saint bestowed his curses on all venomous reptiles, so that from thenceforth they should never more infest the Emerald Island. On noticing this to our guide, in a manner that implied a

doubt on the subject, he replied, “ And sure your honour believes that St. Patrick could *asily* do all this, and a mighty *dale* more.” To be sure, as is confirmed by the song :

“ ’Twas on the top of this high hill, St. Patrick preach'd his
sarmint
That drove the frogs into the bogs, and bother'd all the
varmint.”

I cannot take my leave of Westport without recurring to the very distressed situation of the small farmers and labouring peasantry of Mayo, particularly in those seasons of scarcity that so often occur. Although the representations that are so frequently made of famine and disease, and the appeal to England for relief, are almost always grossly, and sometimes intentionally, exaggerated, yet there is but too strong ground to believe that, if the charitable contributions from the British Government and the people of England were withheld on such occasions, many thousands would perish of actual destitution. A very general complaint is prevalent in Ireland, whether true or false is not for me to say, that neither the wealthy landlords, the gentry, nor the great farmers, are willing to contribute anything for the support of the poor ; and that if it were not for the humane and kindly feeling of the small tradesmen and shopkeepers, and for the feeble assistance which the poor are ever ready mutually to give to the utmost of their power to each other, instances of death from absolute want of food would more frequently occur than they are known to do. It is also pretty well known that the charitable subscriptions of generous individuals, and of the Government of England, have been shamefully misapplied.

When the Government, therefore, in 1831, decided to relieve the starving population in the west, they sent out Sir John Hill, the Superintendent of Deptford Victualling Yard, to Mayo and Galway, to manage the funds, with instructions to purchase and distribute meal and potatoes among the starving inhabitants, at the very lowest cost price they could be procured ; and in addition a large sum of money to be dealt out to such as were absolutely destitute. He found very little disease prevailing, and no general scarcity of food ; but he did find that cargoes of oats were shipping off from Galway and also from Westport—that provisions were locked up and made unavailable, with the view of raising the prices of articles of the first necessity. I do not suppose that such conduct is peculiar to the Irish traders, but that it differs only in degree from what sometimes happens in England. They are all, according to Johnson's definition, “ men long used in the method of money-getting ;” one of which methods, by no means unusual, being to create a scarcity in order to enhance prices.

On the present occasion every artifice was made use of, through some of the Irish newspapers, to create an alarm of famine, by fabricated accounts of disease and deaths by starvation, which were eagerly brought forward at the meetings, called by Sir John, of the principal inhabitants and clergy of the counties of Mayo and Galway, the former of which was held at Castlebar, and the latter at Galway. Attempts were made to get possession of the public money thus sent, and to purchase provisions at high prices, to which they had been factitiously raised. But Sir John was too well conversant in matters of this kind to suffer himself to be duped. He had laid his plans in Liverpool and Dublin, to obtain meal and potatoes, and ship them off quietly to the western ports ; and as these supplies dropped into Westport and Galway, the result of their importation was, that the price of oatmeal was immediately brought down from 18*l.* to 12*l.* a ton, and the hoarded meal was now brought to market. On one occasion, when from the state of the weather the provision ships could not enter the bay, a cargo of Indian corn or maize was purchased, but Sir John Hill was told that the poor would not eat it, as it was not adapted to Irish constitutions.

The Irish are, it must be said, a singular people. As soon as it was understood that Government had sent an agent with money to purchase provisions, they considered themselves re-

lieved from any further thought about the poor ; and the very persons, who had been fed by the bounty of the public, assembled in crowds, attacked the meal-carts, and carried off the booty, so that no Government supplies could be sent into the country without a guard ; and even this was not enough. In vain did the troops, who were called in, endeavour to prevail on them to desist ; the consequence was, that two or three were killed, and as many wounded. The Catholic Archbishop of Tuam (not the present Dr. M'Hale, but Dr. Kelly, a very different character) made it known, that one of the wounded aggressors on his death-bed declared that he was not in want, and lamented that he should have been engaged in so unwarrantable a proceeding. The peasantry seemed to think that there was no wrong whatever in attacking and plundering the public property ; and the proof that they acted on this principle is, that in the midst of all these riotous proceedings, private property of every description, even provisions of various kinds, passed through the assembled multitude without the slightest molestation.

The extent of the famine in 1831 may be inferred from the fact that, in order to aid the poor to purchase potatoes and meal, the sum of sevenpence a-week was allotted to each individual of 225,680 persons, and these mostly, say 220,000, were inhabitants of Mayo. Now, as the population of Mayo, as taken in that same year, was only 366,328, it follows that five-eighths of the whole population of the province were in a state of destitution.

If, then, for this scanty pittance of sevenpence a-head per week, 225,680 persons can be rescued, during the months of famine, from death by starvation, is it not a reflection on the great landholders of this county, and still more so on the absentees, that they will not only not contribute to relieve a temporary distress, but endeavour to prevent, as far as in them lies, any legal provision being made for the maintenance of the poor, no longer able to support themselves? but it must come to this,—humanity will not for ever suffer such an outrage to continue.

It will be asked, whence proceeds this deplorable condition of so vast a portion of the population of Mayo ? It is true there is an unusual quantity of bog-land, uncultivated mountains and moors ; but, from all I can learn, the causes of the frequent recurrence of famine and its dreadful consequences lie much deeper than want of land for an overgrown population. The soil is not, generally speaking, an ungrateful one, nor are there wanting wealthy landlords ; but the tenure on which the lands are let, sometimes to agents or middlemen, or large farmers, who split their holdings into small parcels, let out at enormously increased rents to tenants-at-will, is ruinous to the poor peasant who ventures to take them. This wretched system, however, is said to be on the decline. The same thing happens in the case of long leases : the father of the family dies, or frequently before his death he partitions the farm into as many portions as he has sons ; and these again, in their turn, divide their portion among their sons ; so that, before the lease expires, the original holding is split into parcels of an acre or two each, and the whole family reduced to the lowest ebb of distress ; the male part to become common labourers, for whom little or no employment is to be had more than five or six months in the year, at the daily pittance of eightpence to tenpence a-day.

Another cause is, the practice pursued by agents or speculators in land. One of these, for instance, will hold a farm on a long lease of two hundred acres, of which he splits one hundred into small parcels of two or three acres, at a greatly advanced rent, so as to keep the other hundred in his own hands rent free. There is little risk of losing his rent : if the poor tenant cannot pay, he immediately distrains both on the crop and the stock. It has truly been said that, by tenures-at-will, short leases, and tithes, “ the harvest of the poor man's life is reaped in his old age by his priest or his landlord.”

The consequence of this ruinous system is, that whole families are reduced to a state bordering on starvation, and take refuge in the miserable hovels, as daily labourers, with which Mayo, and I understand most of the middle and southern counties are strewed over and

disfigured. It is most melancholy to look into one of these abodes of wretchedness, to see a whole family worn down by disease and famine,—not a chair nor stool to rest their wearied limbs upon ; not a bed to lie down upon, except a little straw, often wetted with the rain that drips from the roof ; and a blanket, and that not always—sometimes an old tarpaulin—thrown over the whole family, to serve as a substitute for bed-clothes. From the almost constant rain that falls in this climate, the floor of these hovels is generally broken into mud-holes ; a pool of water stagnates before the door and, after a heavy shower, enters the hovel, there being generally a step *down* from the door. A few cold potatoes frequently serve as their daily and only food ; for many of them are unable to purchase a constant supply of turf to cook them at such times as they may be wanted. This is the melancholy and, I believe, true picture of a family reduced to the condition of labouring cottiers, who are satisfied to take such employment as they can get, when famine and disease have not yet reduced them to a state of weakness which disables them from work altogether.

Even while the small farmer is able, from his surplus produce, to pay his rent, his condition is far from enviable, but might with a little management be improved. If he can afford to keep a cow and a pig, he generally admits both to be partakers of the same apartment ; and though his cottage may be a degree better than that of the labourer, yet it is kept equally filthy ; everything within it being soiled with smoke and soot, and the puddle and the dung-hill invariably found before the door. The rent of such a cottage, if built by the landlord, may be about 2*l.* a-year ; turf, 30*s.* ; the mans clothing, 40*s.* ; the woman's, 30*s.* ; and four children, say 30*s.*; making altogether 8*l.* 10*s.* The rent, say of three acres and a cow-grass, 9*l.* The routine of his crops is, potatoes, barley, and oats. The barley is sold to be distilled into whiskey, and this and the pig contribute to the payment of rent and fuel ; and the potatoes, the cow, and the oat-meal, supply the family with food. The females are employed in spinning linen and woollen yarn, and in knitting worsted stockings ; of the woollen yarn is manufactured a kind of frieze, druggets and flannels, the common wear of the peasantry : after supplying the family clothing, the surplus helps to pay the rent.

There is still another class of paupers, the most destitute and helpless of all—the aged, the sick, and the infirm,—dependent wholly on the charity of the neighbouring poor, and on the alms they, or their younger companions in misery, are able to raise from passing travellers. In some few places a scanty fund is raised for the sick, but wholly inadequate, “ the gentry and landlords seldom subscribing.” These poorest of all poor creatures find their only shelter from the weather in the most wretched of hovels, made of sods, stuck generally by the side of the public roads, thatched over with heaths, shrubby branches, rushes, or anything they can get, but which are so wretchedly constructed as to be, in every corner, pervious to the rain ; and even hovels of this kind are frequently demolished by some heartless farmer, on whose grounds they intrude. How these unhappy creatures contrive to subsist, or even to drag through the winter season a miserable existence, is quite inexplicable,—the fact is, they die unnoticed, disregarded, unregretted, and no inquiry made about them. There is no other country on the face of the earth where such extreme misery prevails as in Ireland. The negro slave, if only from interested motives, is well taken care of,—even the American Indian, the Esquimaux, the Hottentot, live and die in luxury, compared with this description of Irish paupers ; yet, notwithstanding all the misery the peasants suffer, their numbers go on increasing to a frightful degree : one would almost be led to conclude, that the nearer the approach to a state of destitution, the more favourable is it for an increase of population.

A tour round Ireland, through the sea-coast counties, in the autumn of 1835 (1836)

Author : Barrow, John, 1808-1898

Publisher : London : J. Murray

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : Lyrasis Members and Sloan Foundation

Book contributor : University of Pittsburgh Library System

Collection : university_pittsburgh; americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/tourroundireland00barr>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

November 21 2011