

THE SUNNY SIDE OF IRELAND.

HOW TO SEE IT BY THE GREAT SOUTHERN AND WESTERN RAILWAY.

BY

JOHN O'MAHONY.

With Seven Maps and over 160 Illustrations.

AND A CHAPTER ON THE NATURAL HISTORY OF

THE SOUTH AND WEST OF IRELAND,

BY

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### Introduction.

Travelling through Ireland in the good old times was at best a precarious and inconvenient diversion. Those who had to do so regretted the necessity, and those who had not, praised Providence. Many "persons of quality," to use Dr. Johnson's phrase, have written narratives of their adventures and experiences in "the most damnable country." No man of position, even early in the nineteenth century, would dream of travelling threescore miles from his residence without having signed and sealed his last will and testament. The highways were beset by "Gentlemen of the Road," such as that fascinating felon, "Brennan on the Moor," of whom the ballad tells--

"A brace of loaded pistols he carried night and day."

The coach roads were dangerous, the stage was deplorable, and everything but the scenery unpleasant. The interior and west of the country were connected with Dublin by canals cut in the time of the Irish Parliament, which followed the enterprise of the Dutch. They were looked upon at the time as feats of engineering skill, somewhat in the light that we view the Suez or Panama Canals to-day. Neville, the engineer, was the recipient of extravagant encomiums from the Lords and Commons, and his fame is embalmed in a street ballad which sings the praise of--

"Bold Neville,  
Who made the streams run level  
In that bounding river  
Called the Grand Canal."

Nowadays we have changed all that, and Neville and his skill are as little remembered in Ireland as the military-road cutter in Scotland, of whom, to show that Ireland had not the monopoly in "bulls," an English admirer wrote:--

"If you had seen those roads before they  
Were made,  
You would hold up your hands and bless  
General Wade."

A poor Italian boy--Charles Bianconi--who tramped through the country as a print-seller, was the first, in the days of Waterloo, in the south of Ireland, to begin really that healthy competition with the mail-coaches which made straight the way for the Iron Horse.

The Great Southern and Western Railway was incorporated in 1845. Mr. Under-Secretary Drummond, the English statesman who got closest to the Irish heart, was identified with the construction of the line.

Year after year the Company prospered and increased, gradually absorbing the smaller lines adjoining it until the year 1901, when it amalgamated the only two other systems of broad gauge lines in their district which had remained independent. Practically the two provinces of Munster and Connaught are now knit together by the great network of railway lines which comprise the Great Southern and Western System. The total length is about 1,100 miles. The main line stretches from Dublin, through Cork, to Queenstown, forming the route for the American Mails and the great transatlantic passenger traffic. Branches extend to Waterford, Limerick, Killarney, and Kerry, and every place of importance in the South of Ireland, while in the west the line extends from Tralee, through Limerick, to Sligo. The carriages which the Company provide are of the very latest design; vestibule corridor trains, with dining and breakfast cars, are run daily, and the speed of the trains will bear comparison with any. The journey, Dublin to Cork (165 miles) is performed in four hours; to Killarney (189 miles) in about fifteen minutes more, and all the important tourist centres can be reached within a very short time. The comfort of passengers is well arranged for; refreshment rooms are provided at the principal stations, and breakfast, luncheon, and tea baskets can always be had, as well as pillows, rugs, and all the modern conveniences of travel. Besides all this, the enterprise of the Company has provided at Killarney, Parknasilla, Kenmare, Caragh Lake, and Waterville, hotels, which for appearance and luxury, tempered by economy, are the equals of any in Europe.

#### **PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.**

Since "The Sunny Side of Ireland" was issued the Royal Assent has been given to an Act of Parliament which makes the Great Southern and Western Railway foremost in every sense amongst Irish Railways. The two Provinces of Munster and Connaught are now knit together by a huge network of railway lines comprised in their amalgamated system.

Leaving the County Clare by rail we cross into Galway, between Crusheen and Tubber. Beyond the marshy country on the right, away in the woodlands, nestles Loughcootra Castle. The great lake from which the place takes its name covers eight square miles. The hundreds of islets here scattered about its surface are the homes of thousands of herons. The country people have a belief that this bird is a messenger of good omen, and never interfere with it or its young. There is a beautiful legend in Irish of a heron which visited St. Columba, at Iona, a traveller from his own country. This story is recorded in the interesting life of the saint written in the seventh century by Adamnan, one of his successors; a beautiful version in English tells of the saint rising at dawn of day after a dream of the coming of the bird:—

“He looked out over the dreary moor,  
Over the hill so bleak and hoar—  
'A bird from the land I revisit no more  
Has come to visit me,  
Dear Innisfail from thy fragrant shore—  
Land of my own I shall see no more—  
Across the driving sea.’

Then he left his prayer, and ‘Brother,’ he said,  
“Take to thee corn, and oil, and bread,  
A bird has alit—half frozen, half dead—  
Upon our southern strand.  
Then warm him and feed him with gentle care,  
And chafe his wing’s and anoint him there,  
He comes from my own loved land—  
From my own loved land,’ and the old Saint wept;  
But the Monk arose, while the others slept,  
And warmed the heron, and fed and kept  
The bird for a day and night.  
So Columba feeling, though far away,  
For Ireland’s soil—like the Gael to-day—  
One favour in heaven’s sight.”

The magnificent residence was designed and erected similarly to East Comer Castle (by Nash, who remodelled Windsor) for Lord Gort, the head of the Vereker family, at a cost of L70,000. The black hand of the famine of 1847 fed on this property, like many another in Ireland, and it passed from its owners under the Encumbered Estates Act. Cove Park, the residence of Lady Gregory, is just outside Gort. Her Ladyship has found a way to the hearts of the country people by her sympathy with the Irish language movement. Her volume, “Mr. Gregory’s Letter Box,” is a valuable contribution to the history of Ireland in the first three decades of the nineteenth century.

*from*

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