The Charm of Joyce's Country

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TWENTY-FIVE miles away to the eastward from Leenane, across a wild stretch of hill and bog known as Joyce's Country, are the ruins of the old abbey of Cong, and thither we set out, next morning, behind a little black mare who would need all her staying powers for the trip that day, and on a car driven, as was fitting, by a man named Joyce as perhaps half the men are who live in this neighbourhood. " Jyce" is the local pronunciation ; and the Joyces are one of the handsomest and fiercest breeds of mountaineers to be met with anywhere fit companions for those of Kentucky and Tennessee.

The original Joyces were Welshmen, so it is said, who came to Ireland about 1300, and, with the permission of the all-powerful O'Flaherties, settled in this country between Lough Mask and the sea. Why they should have chosen so inhospitable a region I don't know perhaps because no one else wanted it. Certainly the O'Flaherties didn't ; for they preferred to live along the sea, where fish was plentiful. But the Joyces were an agricultural people ; they turned as much of the hillside as they could into arable land, cultivated with the spade to this day and reaped with the hook. On the rest of it, they grazed their flocks, and they still graze them there.

It was a beautiful, warm day, with fleecy clouds in the sky and a blue haze about the hills, and everybody was out enjoying the sunshine as we drove through the village and turned up along the shoulder of the Devil's Mother Mountain. The fine weather had brought the men and women out to work in the potato fields such of the men, that is, as hadn't yet left for England or Scotland to spend the summer in the fields there. Usually there were five or six women to one man, each of them armed with a spade or a fork, and it was pitiful to see the poor little patches in which they were working. Almost always they were on a steep hillside there isn't much else but hillside hereabouts which can be cultivated, for even where there happens to be a little level land in the valley, it is almost always wet bog in which nothing can be grown. The patches were very, very small, and each of them was surrounded by a high wall built of the stones which had been dug from the ground ; and at the bottom of every slope was a pile of surplus stones which had been rolled there out of the way.

The potatoes were planted in drills about two feet wide, and then between the drills a deep trench was dug to carry off the water, for even on the hillsides the ground is very wet ; and these trenches must be kept clear of weeds so that the water will run off freely, and of course the drills must be kept clear of weeds too ; and the ground is so poor that manure must be freely used, and the only way to get it where it is needed is to place it there by hand. And almost every time the spade is driven into the ground, it brings up more stones which must be carried away, until it sometimes becomes quite a problem what to do with them.

As many as possible are built into the fences ; and the dominant feature of every Connemara landscape is the zig-zag tapestry of stone walls which covers it. They run in every direction up the sides of hills so steep that it seems a miracle they don't slide off, around fields so small that the ground can't be seen above the fence, along the tops of high ridges where they form grotesque patterns against the sky which shines through every chink, in places where there seems to be no need whatever for a wall and yet to which the stones have been carried with prodigious labour.

But do not suppose that, even with all this toil, the fields are cleared of stones. Everywhere there are out-croppings of solid rock which the tiller of the field has been unable to dislodge, and around which he must sow and reap. In consequence, there are practically no fields in which it would be possible to drive a plow, and few indeed in which it is possible to swing a scythe. The fields themselves are so small that one wonders anybody should trouble to cultivate them at all. I have seen scores and scores not more than fifty feet square, each surrounded with its high wall ; I have seen many less than that, with just space enough for a two-roomed hovel, where the family must take the stock into the house with them, because there is no place for an out-building, and where the manure must be heaped against the wall, because to throw it a foot away would be to put it on land belonging to some one else. The land which the family itself cultivated might lie in twenty different places, miles away.

This complication, which is unparalleled elsewhere in the world, arose in this way : Half a century ago a man would lease some acres of ground and by terrific labour convert it into tillable land. As his sons grew up and his daughters married, he would sub-let to each of his sons and sons-in-law small portions of his holding, and their other relatives would do the same, so that, while each of them might be the tenant of four or five acres, they would be scattered in a dozen different places. A second generation further complicated things. An acre field would be split up between ten different tenants, each with his stone wall around his portion ; and one of the biggest jobs the Congested Districts Board has had to tackle is that of so redistributing the land that each tenant shall have a compact portion.

Imagine the small farmers of any neighbourhood called together for the purpose of redistribution, each of them suspicious and jealous of all the others, each of them believing that his scattered bits of land are quite exceptionally valuable, each of them remembering the bitter labour by which he reclaimed each rood ; and then imagine the patience and tact which are needed to convince them that they are not being cheated, and to persuade them to agree to the proposed re-allotment. Talk about the labours of Hercules ! Why they were child's play compared with this !

We drove on, that morning, down a wide valley, past these tiny walled fields and thatched houses, now and then passing one of the neat little slated cottages which the County Council builds where it can, but which are distressingly few and far between; and then we came out into the grazing country, with stone walls running right up the thousand-foot hillsides to the very top, and the white sheep dotted over the green turf ; and then we turned off along a side-road, which speedily mounted through a narrow pass, across a wide bog, and so to the head of a deep gorge where, far below us, stretched the blue waters of Lough Nafooey, lying in a deep cup of granite mountains.

I have never seen a steeper road than that which zig-zags down into this valley, and I was very glad indeed to get off and walk, not only because of the steepness, but also because on foot I could stop whenever I chose and look at the beautiful scene below—the long, narrow lake, crowded in on the south by steep, bare mountains, and with a white ribbon of road running along its northern edge, past a cluster of houses built close beside it, and with the furrowed fields behind them mounting steeply upwards. The whole village was out at work in the fields, and the red petticoats of the women gave the scene just that added touch of colour it needed.

The mountains on the southern shore grew less rugged presently, and as soon as the ground grew level enough for tillage, it presented such a complicated pattern of stone walls as must be unique, even here in this be-walled district. For more than a mile we drove along opposite them ; and then we reached the end of the lake, and struck off along another valley

toward Lough Mask. We were soon on another desolate moor, dotted with the black stumps of bog oak; and then the road sank into a pass, as the hills closed in on either side, and skirted a dancing brook, and then before us opened the lower part of Lough Mask.

I have said that these Irish mountaineers are fierce, and I must explain now what I meant by that, for a kindlier people, one more eager to bid you welcome or help you on your way, you will find nowhere. The same is true of the Kentucky mountaineers ; and yet they do not hesitate to put a bullet through any man they regard as an enemy. So with the Joyces and the O'Malleys. It was here among these hills that the " Invincibles" and the " Moonlighters" ranged in the days of the Land League ; their notions of right and wrong were, and still are, the old primitive ones. They believe in the Mosaic law of an eye for an eye ; murder after murder has been done here, and no one disapproved ; and yet a man with a purse filled with gold, or a woman with no protection save her chastity, might walk these roads unharmed and unafraid on the darkest night.

Just before one reaches the bridge over the narrow stream through which the upper lake flows into the lower, the road passes close to a cluster of houses, and it was in one of them that two bailiffs of Lord Ardilaun were beaten to death, and their bodies placed in sacks weighted with stones ; and then they were carried down to the lake, and every one along the road was made to lend a hand to carrying them. That was but one tragedy of many such out-breaks of the feud which started six centuries ago, and which only within the past decade has shown any sign of being outlived and forgotten.

I do not know when I have been more impressed and astonished than when I stood on the bridge over the river below Lough Mask, and gazed out upon that noble sheet of water, stretching away to the north like an inland sea. It was dotted with beautiful islands, but no farther shore was visible, not even when we mounted a bold crag overhanging the water in order to get a wider view. We went on again, with the lake at our left, and then the road turned away between high stone walls—only these walls were solidly built of dressed stones laid in mortar, and were surmounted with broken glass set in cement. There was a gate here and there, through which we could catch glimpses of wild and unkempt woods, a-riot with a luxuriant vegetation bearing witness to the richness of the soil.

The wall must have been ten feet high, and after we had gone on for half an hour with no sign of it coming to an end, we asked the driver what it was, and he told us that it was the wall surrounding part of the estate of Lord Ardilaun, which stretches clear on to Cong, a distance of six or eight miles—the very choicest land of the whole district. Some of it is let to tenants, so our driver said, at rents which are almost prohibitive ; but the most part is walled in, with many notices against trespassing posted about it a preserve for woodcock.

We dropped through the little town of Rosshill, once the seat of the Earl of Lei trim (but now owned by Lord Ardilaun), and then into Clonbur (also owned by Lord Ardilaun), where the wall stopped for a while to make room for the houses, but began again as soon as the village ended ; and then we passed a curious collection of cairns on a plateau at the side of the road, some of them surmounted by weather-blackened wooden crosses ; and then on a hill to the right we saw another great cairn ; and then we suddenly realised that we were on the battlefield of Moytura, which raged for five days over this peninsula between Lough Corrib and Lough Mask, so long ago that nobody knows exactly when it was, though it has been roughly dated at two thousand years before Christ.

The contestants in that battle were the Firbolgs, the men of the leathern wallets, who had come from the south to Ireland five days before the flood, and the De Dananns, a tall, fair,

blue-eyed race of magicians from the north, who had " settled on the Connemara mountains in the likeness of a blue mist." The De Dananns were the victors, and the cairns we saw that day were the monuments they raised over the burial places of their dead warriors.

There was another famous battle on this same peninsula, not so many years ago, for over there on the shore of Lough Mask lived Captain Boycott, whose name has passed into the language as that of the silent and effective weapon which the peasantry forged against him, in Land League days.

Half a mile farther, and a sharp turn of the road brought us into the village of Cong, a single street of drab houses, whose principal attraction is the ruins of the abbey where the Cross of Cong was fashioned ; but the long drive had made us hungry, and so first of all we stopped at a clean little inn and had tea, and it was set forth in a service of old silver lustre which Betty marvelled over so warmly that she almost forgot to eat. And then we started for the abbey, which, of course, like everything else hereabouts, belongs to Lord Ardilaun.

From the road, all that one can see of it is a portion of the wall of the church, so over-grown with ivy that even the windows are covered ; but we managed to rout out a boy, who took us around to the cloister side, which is very beautiful indeed, with its lovely broken arcades, its rounded arches, its clustered pillars, and round-headed windows. There is not much of interest left in the church, but in one corner is a small, dark, stone-roofed charnel house, still heaped high with the whitened skulls of the monks who were entombed there.

The abbey stands close to the bank of that wonderful white river which, coming under-ground from Lough Mask, bursts from the earth in a deep chasm a mile above Cong, and sweeps, deep and rapid, down into Lough Corrib. And the monks at Cong were more in-genious than most, for there, on a little island in the middle of the river, stand the ruins of their fishing-house, constructed over a narrow channel into which the nets were dropped, and they were so arranged that when a fish was captured, its struggles rang a bell back at the abbey, and some one would hasten to secure it. We made our way through an orchard of beautiful old apple trees bearded with lichen, waist-deep in grass, to the very edge of the stream, that I might get the picture of this labour-saving edifice.

Then the boy asked us if we would care to see Ashford House, the seat of Lord Ardilaun; and for the benefit of those of my readers who are wondering from what ancient family Lord Ardilaun is descended, I may as well state here that he is none other than Guinness, of Guinness's Stout, and takes his title of Baron Ardilaun from a little island out in Lough Corrib. We said, of course, that we should like to see Ashford House, and we walked for half a mile through the beautiful woods of the demesne, up to the great mansion of limestone and granite, set at the edge of a terrace sloping down to the lake. The entrance to it is under a square tower with drawbridge and portcullised gateway, and the house itself is a mammoth affair, with turrets and battlements and towers and machicolations and other mediævalities, quite useless and meaningless on a modern residence, and there are acres and acres of elabor-ately-planted grounds, with sunken gardens and fountains and long shady avenues stretching away into dim distance.

But nobody lives here except a few caretakers, for Lord Ardilaun, an old man of seventy-three, prefers the south of France, so that Ashford House is deserted from year's end to year's end, except for a few days now and then when a shooting-party of more than usual import-ance comes to kill the woodcock. For the ordinary party, another mansion, farther down the lake on Doon Hill, suffices ; but when the king comes, as he did in 1905, of course the great house has to be opened.

One reads in Murray, which is a very British guide-book, how, on that occasion, the king and his party killed ninety brace of woodcock in a single day ; and how, five years later, 587 brace were bagged in five days ; but it will be quite impossible for you to understand, unless you are also British, the peculiar veneration with which such coverts as these are regarded by British sportsmen, and the peculiar cast of mind which deems it right and proper that thousands of fertile acres should be maintained as game preserves in a land where most of the people are forced to wring their livelihood from the rocky hillsides.

It is only for such great parties that Lord Ardilaun returns to do the honours ; and he hastens away again, as soon as the parties are over. He knows nothing of his tenants ; he leaves the collection of his rents to a factor, and the preservation of his coverts to a force of gamekeepers, and any one caught inside the wall may expect to be prosecuted to the limit of the law.

Now I have no quarrel with Lord Ardilaun. The stout he sells is honest stout, and he got possession of this estate by honest purchase, which is more than can be said for most great estates in Ireland. But he presents an example of that absentee landlordism which has been the chief and peculiar curse of this unfortunate country. With landlords who lived on their estates and looked after their properties and got acquainted with their tenants and took some human interest in their welfare, the tenants themselves seldom had any quarrel. It was the landlords who lived in England or on the continent, who entrusted the collection of rents to agents, and whose only interest in their Irish estates was to get the largest possible returns from them—it was these men who kept the country in an uproar of eviction and persecution.

Indeed, I believe that if all Irish landlords were resident landlords, the Irish labourer would be better off without the land purchase act ; for there are no more grasping and exacting masters in the world than the small farmers to whom the great estates are passing. The old owners might be despotic, but they were not mean ; and where they lived among their people and came to know them, their despotism was usually a benevolent despotism, tempered with mercy. The rule of the small farmer will be a despotism, too, but there will be no mercy about it. Joyce, our driver, voiced all this in a sentence, as we were driving back.

“ Land purchase, is it ?” he said, puffing his short pipe, and staring out across the hills. “ Yes, I have heard much of it ; but I’m thinking it will be a cruel time for the poor.”

The neighbourhood of Cong is remarkable for its natural curiosities, for the ground to the north toward Lough Mask is honeycombed with caves, made by the water working its way through to Lough Corrib. Geologists explain it learnedly, and doubtless to their own satisfaction, by saying that the peninsula is composed of carboniferous limestone which has been perforated and undermined by the solvent action of the free carbonic acid in the river water ; but I prefer to believe, with the residents of the neighbourhood, that it was the work of the Little People.

The lofty tunnel through which the sunken river flows is accessible in several places, and one of these, called the Pigeon Hole, is not far from the village and is worth visiting. It is in the centre of a field, and is a perpendicular hole some sixty feet deep, clothed with ferns and moss and very damp indeed, and the steps by which one goes down are very slippery, so that some caution is necessary; but there at the bottom is a vaulted cavern through which the river sweeps. The girl who has come along, carrying a wisp of straw, lights it and walks away into the depths of the cavern, but the effect is not especially dazzling and the smoke from the straw is most offensive. They order these things better in France—at the Grotto of Han, for instance !

Another curiosity of the peninsula is not a natural but an artificial one—a canal dug during famine times with government money to connect Lough Corrib with Lough Mask. This was expected to be a great blessing to the west of Ireland, extending navigation from Galway clear up across Lough Mask and Lough Conn to Ballina ; but, alas, when it was finished, it was found that the canal wouldn't hold water, for the rock through which it was cut was so porous that the water ran through it like a sieve, and left the canal as dry as a bone. So there it remains to this day, and one may walk from end to end of it dry shod and ponder on the marvels of English rule in Ireland !

One thing more at Cong is worth inspecting, and that is the old cross which stands at the intersection of the street with the road to the abbey. It was erected centuries ago to the memory of two abbots, Nicol and Gilbert O'Duffy, whose names may yet be read on its base ; and it is a cross that can work miracles. Here is one of them :

There was a boy here at Cong, once, who was stupid and could learn nothing, but spent all his time wandering along the river or climbing the hills or lying in the fields staring up at the sky. Everybody said he would come to a bad end ; but one day he sat down on the base of this cross, and fell asleep with his head against it ; and that night, when he went home, he took up the newspaper which his father was reading and read aloud every word that was on it ; and they took him to the priest, thinking a spell was on him, and there was not a book the priest had, in Latin or Irish or any language whatever, but the boy he could read it at a glance ; and they sent him down to Cork to the college there, but there was nothing his masters could teach him that he did not know already ; and the fame of him became so great that when Queen Victoria was looking about her for a man to put at the head of the new college at Galway, she hit upon him, and so he was given charge of Queen's College, and his name was O'Brien Crowe, and he made that college a great college, and he taught things there that no other man in Ireland had ever so much as dreamed of !

I am sorry I had not heard this tale when I was at Galway; I should have liked to ask Bishop O'Dee how much of it is true.

We returned to Leenane by a different road, which lay for some miles close beside the shore of Lough Corrib, white-capped now under a stiff wind which had arisen, and studded with lovely green islands. It is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful of the Irish lakes, but even here the shadow of Land League days still lingers, for close by the shore is Ebor Hall, which was the residence of Lord Mountmorris, who was beaten to death near by ; and as we drove on, our jarvey pointed out the scenes of similar if less famous tragedies, whose details I have forgotten. But all that was thirty years ago ; the problem which the Land League tried to solve has been solved in another fashion; the peasantry of Ireland have won the fight for fair rent, fixed hold, and free sale, and can afford to forget the past.

Just beyond the Doon peninsula, the road opens up the long expanse of the narrow arm of the lake which runs back many miles into the mountains, and on an island a little distance from the shore, towers the keep of a ruined castle—Caisleán-na-Circe, or Hen Castle in the prosaic vernacular. Islands, as you will have remarked before this, were a favourite place in Ireland for castles and monasteries, and the deeper the water about them the better, for it was a welcome defence in the days when midnight raids were the favourite pastime of every chief, and no sport was so popular with the English as that of hunting the Irish " wolves."

There are many legends to explain the name of this castle in Lough Corrib. One is that the castle was built in a single night by an old witch and her hen, and she gave it and the hen to The O'Flaherty, telling him that, if the castle was ever besieged, he need not worry about

provisions, since the hen would lay eggs enough to keep the garrison from want. It was not long before a force of O'Malleys ferried over from the mainland and camped down about the walls, and O'Flaherty, forgetting the witch's words, killed the hen and was soon starved out. Another legend is that the castle was held during a long siege by the formidable Grainne, wife of Donell O'Flaherty, and that her husband was so proud of her that he named the place Hen Castle in her honour. Still another is that the Joyces were holding it against the O'Flaherties, but were about to surrender, when the famous Grace O'Malley marched a party of her clansmen over the mountains from the sea and drove the O'Flaherties off, and so it was named after her. These are examples of what the Irish imagination can do when it turns itself loose ; for the fact is that the castle, at least as it stands now, was built by Richard de Burgo, that first old doughty Norman ruler of Connaught, to hold the pass from the isthmus of Cong into the wilds of Connemara. The keep is plainly Anglo-Norman, flanked by great square towers of cut limestone.

A few miles farther on is the village of Maam, set in the midst of magnificent scenery at the intersection of two valleys, one running to the west and one to the south, closed in by the wildest, bleakest, ruggedest of mountains. Our driver drew up here to water and wind the horse, and I wandered about the village for a while, and stopped at last at the open door of a little cottage where an old woman and some children were sitting before a flaring fire of turf, and a hen was hovering some chickens in a basket in one corner. Three or four others were wandering about the dirt floor, looking for crumbs as a matter of habit, though they must have known perfectly well that there were no crumbs there.

I was welcomed heartily and invited to sit down before the fire, with that instinctive courtesy and open-heartedness which is characteristic of the Irish peasantry. Let the traveller take shelter anywhere, pause before any door, and he will be greeted warmly. There is an old Irish riddle which runs something like this :

From house to house it goes,
A wanderer frail and slight,
And whether it rains or snows,
It bides outside in the night.

It is the footpath the Irish mean ; and if they could bring it in out of the rain and the snow, I am sure they would, just as they bring their chickens and cats and dogs and pigs and donkeys in, to share the warmth of the fire.

So in this little cottage a stool was at once vacated for me and set in a good place, and a ring of smiling faces closed around me, and the rain of eager questions began as to whence I came and whither I was going. I wish I could give you some idea of the tangle of trash that littered the single room of that hovel—old clothes, old boards, broken baskets, a pile of turf in one corner but scattered all about where the chickens had been scratching at it, a low shelf piled with rags and straw for a bed, a rude dresser displaying some chipped dishes but I despair of picturing it. And the dirty, ragged children, with their bright eyes and red cheeks; and the old woman, wrinkled and toil-worn, but obviously thinking life not so bad, after all ...

A whistle from Joyce told me that he was ready to start, and we were soon climbing out of the valley, emerging at last upon a vast moor, with great mountain masses away to the south, their summits veiled in mist. We could see groups of people working in the bog here and there, and at last we came upon two men and two boys cutting turf close to the road. I asked them if I might take their picture, and they laughed and agreed, but the sun was setting and the light was not good enough to give me a sharp negative. Still one can see the man at the

bottom of the ditch cutting the peat with a sharp-edged instrument like a narrow spade and throwing the water-soaked bricks out on the edge, where the boys picked them up and laid them out at a little distance to dry.

" There's one would make a picture," said Joyce, about ten minutes later, and I turned to see him pointing with his whip at a little girl unloading turf from the panniers of a donkey by the side of the road.

Needless to say, I was out of my seat in an instant, and Betty, scarcely less excited, was asking the girl if I might not take her picture ; and then Joyce said something to her in the Irish, and then from across the bog came her mother's voice telling her, also in Irish, to hold still and do as the gentleman wished.

She was a child of eight or ten, with dark hair and eyes, and slighter and frailer than the average Irish child ; and she wore the characteristic garment fashioned from red flannel which all the poor children in Connemara wear ; and she was bare-headed and bare-footed ; and her task was to drive the ragged little donkey out into the bog and fill the panniers with the bricks, and drive it back again to the side of the road, and pile the turf there, ready for the cart which would take it away. From the place where the turf was being cut to the roadside was at least a quarter of a mile, and how often that child had travelled that road that day I did not like to think. From the pile of turf that lay at the side of the road, it was evident she had not idled !

She was not without her vanity, for she had her skirt kilted up, and let it quickly down as soon as she realised what I wanted ; and then she let me pose her as I wished. You should have seen her astonishment when I pressed a small coin into her hand, as some slight recompense for the trouble I had given her ; you should have seen her shining eyes and trembling lips . . .

Up we went and up, with the mists of evening deepening about us ; and at last we reached the summit of the pass, and dropped rapidly down toward Leenane. Half an hour later, we trotted briskly up to the hotel, the little mare apparently as fresh as ever, in spite of the fifty miles, up hill and down, she had covered that day.

The Real Irish Problem

It was well we went to Cong when we did, for the next day was cold and rainy, with a clammy mist in the air which settled into the valleys and soaked everything it touched. I walked over to the village, after breakfast, to keep my promise to the school-teacher. The school is a dingy frame building with two rooms and two teachers, a man for the older pupils and a woman for the younger ones. They are brother and sister, and from their poor clothes and half-fed appearance, I judge that teachers are even worse paid in Ireland than elsewhere. But they both welcomed me warmly, and the man hastened to set out for me the only chair in the place, carefully dusting it beforehand. He called the roll, and it was delightful to hear the soft, childish voices answer " Prisent, sorr," " Prisent, sorr." Then he counted heads to be sure, I suppose, that some child hadn't answered twice, once for himself and once for some absent friend. There were about thirty children present, ranging in age from six to fifteen; and they were all barefoot, of course, and such clothing as they had was very worn and ragged, and most of them had walked four or five miles, that morning, down out of the hills. The teacher said sadly that the attendance should be twice as large, but there was no way of enforcing the compulsory education law, though the priest did what he could.

I wish I could paint you a picture of that school, so that you could see it, as I can, when I close my eyes. In the larger room there was a little furniture—a chair and cheap desk for the teacher, some rude forms for the children, and a small blackboard ; but the other room was absolutely bare, and the children sat around on the floor in a circle, with their legs sticking out in front of them, red with cold, while the teacher stood in their midst to hear them recite. Each of them had over his shoulder a cheap little satchel, usually tied together with string ; and in this he carried his two or three books thin, paper-covered affairs, which cost a penny each ; and all the children, large and small, had to carry their books about with them all the time they were in school because there was no place to put them.

The reading lesson had just started when I entered the room where the smaller children were, and it was about the advantages of an education. It brought tears to the eyes to hear them, in their soft voices and sweet dialect, read aloud with intense earnestness what a great help education is in the battle of life and in how many ways it is useful. When the reading was done, the teacher asked them the meaning of the longest words, and had them tell again in their own way what the lesson had said, to be certain that they understood it.

Poor kiddies ! As I looked at them, I could see in my mind's eye our schoolhouses back home, heated and ventilated by the best systems—there was ventilation enough here, heaven knows, for the door was wide open, but no heat, though the day was very raw and chilly, and the children were shivering—equipped with expensive furniture and the latest devices of charts and maps ; and I could see the well-fed, well-clothed children, with their beautiful costly books which make teachers almost unnecessary, languidly reading some such lesson as was being read here in Connaught, on the advantages of an education ! It would not have been read so earnestly, be sure of that, nor with such poignant meaning.

And in that moment, I thrilled with a realisation of Ireland's greatest and truest need. It is not land purchase, or reform of the franchise, or temperance, or home rule, though these needs are great enough ; it is education. It is education only that can solve her industrial problems and her labour problems ; and, however she may prosper under the favouring laws of a new political regime, it is only by education, by the banishment of ignorance and illiteracy, that she can hope to take her place among the nations of the world.

It was a sort of vision I had, standing there in that bare little room, of a new Ireland, dotted with schools and colleges, as she was a thousand years ago, illumined with the white light of knowledge ; but here, meanwhile, were these eager, bright-eyed, ragged little children, stumbling along the path of knowledge as well as they could ; but a rocky path they find it, and how deserving of help they are! I wish you could have seen those soiled, thumbed little readers, which cost, as I have said, only a penny each, and which, if they had cost more, would have been beyond the reach of the average Connaught family.

I bought a few of them, afterwards, to bring home with me, and when I looked through them, I found them very primitive indeed. Here, for instance, is Lesson Six in the primer:

> Pat has a cat.
> It is fat. It is on the mat.
> The cat ran at the rat.
> It bit the fat cat.
> Pat hit the rat.
> The rat ran. The cat ran at it.
> The rat bit the fat cat.

Cats and rats used, I remember, to be favourite sub- jects in the readers of my own early school days; and so were dogs. It is still so in Ireland, as Lesson Eight will show:

Is it a dog ?
It is a fox.
Was the fox in a box ?
The dog was in the box.
He was in the mud.
Rub the mud off the dog.
He ran at the fox in the mud.
The dog ran at the fox and bit it.

My principal objection to this is that it is nonsense : how, for example, if the dog was in the box, could it have been also in the mud ? These questions occur to children even more readily than to adults, and to teach them nonsense is wrong and unjust. Also these lessons tell no story ; they have no continuity; they ask questions without answering them ; they change the subject almost as often as the dictionary. Here, for instance, is the first lesson of the second term :

Tom put the best fish in a dish.
The cat sat near it on a rug.
Let the hen rest in her nest.
Frank rode a mile on an ass.
He went so fast he sent up the dust.

The last sentence shows it was an Irishman made this book ; but why, in this lesson, did he not continue with the story of the fish in the dish, which the cat was plainly watching from the rug with malicious intent, instead of branching off to a wholly irrelevant remark about a hen, and then to an account of Frank's adventure with an ass ? Perhaps the first step to be made in educational reform in Ireland is the adoption of better school-books, and there is no reason why this step should be delayed.

I went back, presently, to the other room where the larger boys and girls were reciting in small sections, standing shrinkingly before the shrivelled little teacher, whose fierceness, I am sure, was assumed for the occasion, and he got out for me a sheaf of compositions which the boys and girls had written on the subject, " My Home," and of which he was evidently very proud. They were written in the round, laborious penmanship of the copy-book, and the homes which they described were, for the most part, those poor little cabins clinging to the rocky hillsides, which I have tried to picture ; but here the picture was drawn sharply and simply, with few strokes, without any suspicion that it was a tragic one. For instance, this is John Kerrigan's picture of

My Home.

My home is in County Galway and is placed in Ganaginula. It is built on a height near the roadside. The length of it is eighteen feet and the breadth is six feet. It is about ten feet high. The covering is timber and thatch. It is built with stones and mortar. There are four windows, two in the kitchen and two in the room. The floor is made of sand and gravel.

That was all that John Kerrigan found to describe about his home, and I dare say there wasn't much more ; but it is easy to picture it standing there on the bleak hillside, with its low walls of rubble and its roof of thatch, and its two little rooms, nine feet by six, with dirt floor and tiny windows. And at one end of the kitchen there would be an open fireplace, with some

blocks of turf smoking in it, and above the turf there would be hanging a black pot, where the potatoes are boiling which is all John will have for supper . . .

I put the compositions aside, for a lesson in Gaelic had begun. The teacher wrote on the little blackboard some sentences composed of the strangest-looking words imaginable, and the pronunciation of them was stranger still. But the lesson proceeded rapidly, and it was evident that most of the children understood Gaelic quite as well as they did English. That, of course, is not saying very much ; and I fancy that about all these children can be expected to learn is to read and write. Indeed, it is a wonder that they learn even that, for the odds against them are almost over-whelming.

I bade them good-bye at last, and returned pensively to the hotel, and there I found the district physician making some repairs to his motor-cycle. It probably needs them often, for the roads up into the hills are trying for anything on wheels ; but he said it was surprising where it would go and how much knocking about it would stand. And then, naturally enough, we fell into talk about his work.

Every poor person in Ireland is, as I understand it, entitled to free medical attendance. The country is divided into districts, in each of which a doctor is stationed, paid partially by the government and depending for the remainder of his income on his private practice. Before a person is entitled to free attendance, he must secure a ticket from one of the poor-law guardians, who have the management of the charities in each district ; and no physician is compelled to give free attendance, unless the person asking for it can produce one of these tickets.

" Even then," continued the doctor at Leenane, who was explaining all this to me, " I don't put myself out, if I think the person presenting the ticket can afford to pay. I look him over, of course, and give him some medicine, with instructions how to take it—the law compels me to do that ; but I don't bother myself to see whether the instructions are carried out. And if he's really sick, he soon realises that if he wants me to be interested, he's got to pay for it, and he manages to find a guinea or so. This sounds hard-hearted, perhaps ; but it's astonishing how many beggars there are in this country, and how the poor-law guardians let themselves be imposed on. Why, people come to me with cards and try to get free attendance who could buy and sell me ten times over ! I don't bite my tongue telling them what I think of them, you may well believe. The trouble is, the poor-law guardians are natives of the district and they all have some axe to grind ; so the doctor, who is a stranger for whom they care nothing, gets the worst of it. This is about the worst district in Ireland, anyway, so big and poor and full of hills. A man has to work himself to death to make three hundred pounds a year out of it."

Various reflections occurred to me while he was talking. One was that three hundred pounds a year is many, many times the income of the average dweller in Connaught ; and another was that, to leave any discretion to the physician in regard to the treatment of charity patients is not without its dangers ; and still a third was that, in any sudden emergency, such as might occur at any time, many valuable minutes would be lost if the poor-law guardians had to be hunted up and a card obtained before the doctor could be summoned. I suppose, in such cases, the doctor is summoned first, and the card secured when there is time to do so.

It is probably only in cases of dire need that the district doctor is summoned at all. The fact that he is a stranger and a government appointee is enough to make a large section of the Irish peasantry distrust him. This one told me that he is never called for confinement cases, because every old Irish woman considers herself competent to handle them, and usually is; and that other cases are treated with " home remedies" or visits to holy wells, until they get so bad that the doctor is turned to as a last resort.

" The ignorance of the people is past all belief," he went on. "They haven't any idea of what causes disease ; they never heard of germs ; they don't know it is unhealthy to have a stinking heap of manure and human excrement under the window or in front of the door ; they don't believe there is any reason why a person dying with consumption shouldn't sleep in the same bed with other people, and eat out of the same dishes, and spit all about the place. And so we have typhus, and tuberculosis—you Americans are partially responsible for that."

" In what way ?" I asked.

" The people born and reared in these western highlands, with lungs adapted through long generations to this soft, moist climate, can't stand the American atmosphere. When they are poor and live crowded together in your towns, consumption gets them ; and then, when they're too far gone to work, they come back home to cough their lives out and poison all their friends. They lie in these dark cabins without a window, which soon become perfect plague-spots ; and the children, playing on the filthy, infected floor, get the infection in their lungs ; or perhaps they cut their knees and rub it into the sore. Ugh ! it makes one sick to think about it. There ought to be a law preventing any such infected person landing in Ireland —you won't let such a one land in America."

I had to admit that that would be one way of dealing with the mischief ; and I suggested that another way would be to try to educate the people to some knowledge of the simpler facts of hygiene. But the doctor snorted.

" Educate them !" he echoed. " You can't educate them ! Why, you haven't any conception of the depths of their ignorance. And they're superstitious, too ; they don't believe in science ; they think it's something irreligious, something against their faith. If prayers to the Virgin won't cure them, or a visit to some holy well or other, why nothing will. If I do cure them, I don't get the credit—they simply believe they've got on the good side of one of their saints. What is a man to do against such ignorance as that ? The only reason they don't all die is because this country is so full of little streams that the running water carries off most of their filth, and the turf smoke which fills their houses helps to disinfect them."

I agreed that his was a hard task ; and left him still tinkering with his motor-cycle, and went over to smoke a pipe with the men at the stables. Joyce, our driver of the day before, was there, and he smiled as he pointed his pipe-stem toward the doctor, with whom he had seen me talking.

" He's a hard one, he is," he said. " Not a word of advice nor a sup of medicine do you get out of that one, if he thinks you've got a shillin' about you. He thinks we're all liars and thieves, which is natural enough, for he's an Englishman—and I'm not sayin' but what it may be true of some of us," and he grinned around at his companions.

" Tell the gintleman about the other one," one of them suggested.

" Ah, Mister O'Beirn, that was," said Joyce ; " a Galway man, born to the Irish. How he got the app'intment, I don't know; but he did stir this district up—went about givin' long talks, he did, about how we're made and why we get sick, and such like ; and he went into the houses and made the women wash the childer and set things to rights, and they bore with him because they knew he meant them no harm. He wore himself to a bone, he did, and we were all fond of him ; but I'm not sayin' it wasn't a relief when he was moved to another district, and we could make ourselves comfortable again."

“ No doubt the children are glad, too,” I ventured.

“ They are, sir ; and why should one bother washin’ them when they get dirty again right away ? Sure the women have enough to do without that !”

But it would be a mistake to suppose that the lives of the women and girls are all work and no play. Betty chanced to remark to the girl who waited on our table at the hotel that she must find the winters very lonesome.

“ Oh, not at all, miss,” she protested. “ We have a very good time in the winter with a dance every week; and at Christmas Mr. McKeown. do be givin’ us a big party here at the hotel. Then there will be maybe two or three weddings, and as many christenings, and some of the girls who have been to America will come home for a visit and there will be dances for them, so there is always plenty to do.”

So Leenane has its social season, just the same as New York and Paris and London ; and I suppose the same is true of every Irish village. The Irish are said to be great dancers, but we were never fortunate enough to see them at it.

You may perhaps have noticed that in such Irish conversations as I have given in these pages, I have contented myself with trying to indicate the idiom, without attempting to imitate the brogue ; and this is because it is impossible to imitate it with any degree of accur-acy. Such imitation would be either a burlesque or would be unreadable. For example, while we were talking to the waitress at Leenane, Betty asked her what a very delicious jam which she served with our tea was made of.

“ Black törn, miss,” she answered—at least, that is what it sounded like.

“ Black törn ?” repeated Betty. “ What is it ? A berry or a fruit ?”

The girl tried to describe it, but not recognisably.

“ Can you spell it ?” asked Betty at last.

“ I can, miss ; b-1-a-c-k, black, c-u-r-r-a-n-t, törn,” answered the girl.

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