

Cong

A tour in Connaught: comprising sketches of Clonmacnoise, Joyce country, and Achill

Caesar Otway

(1839)

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Entrance into the County of Mayo—River Blackwater—Bridge of Shruel—Memorable massacre there—Humane Abbott of Ross Reilly—Character of County Mayo—Appearance of Connemara mountains—Approach to Cong—Description of that singular place—Lough Corrib and Lough Mask—Cavernous state of limestone formation—Village—Want of accommodation—Visit to the Pigeon-hole—Guides—Babby Burke—Discharge of her functions—Cong Abbey—Story—Digression on Irish Abbeys in general—Difference between monastic remains previous and subsequent to English conquest—Tomb of Roderick O'Connor—Tomb of M'Namara the Robber—His history and that of his mare Moreen—Visit to Robber's hole—Story Mishap of Connemara man—Abbots of Cong—Relics—Stories of these valuables—Departure from Cong—Meet an Ulster man—Help him to escape from Connaught hostility.

CROSSING a bridge over the river, which, encircling the walls of Ross Reilly, and dividing the counties of Galway and Mayo, is called, like many others in Ireland, the Blackwater ; it falls, after passing for some distance under ground, into Lough Corrib. About four miles to the north-east is the bridge and castle of Shruel—where was perpetrated one of the most cold-blooded massacres that disgraced the bloody and disastrous period of 1641. Sir Henry Bingham, with a great number of respectable Protestant gentry, and fifteen clergymen, (amongst whom was the bishop of Killala,) being obliged to surrender his stronghold of Castlebar, for want of provisions—capitulated with Lord Mayo, on the condition, that he and the whole garrison should be safely conveyed to Galway. I tell this story, in order to exhibit not only the cruelty, but the wanton treachery of the transaction—for the besieged had not only the assurance of Lord Mayo, the great leader of the Mayo Burkes—but they had the promise of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Tuam, who assured them of a safe delivery at the fort of Galway ; and this was not all—Lord Mayo, the night the convoy arrived at Shruel, made the bishop of Killala sleep with him, in his own bed. This was Saturday—on Sunday Lord Mayo delivered up the convoy to a relative of his own, Edmond Burke, a notorious rebel, and bitter papist—the man who not long before, having taken the bishop of Killala prisoner, wanted to fasten him to the sow (a battering engine) with which he was attempting to beat down the walls of Castlebar, in order that the besieged, in firing, might shoot their own prelate.

To this ferocious man Lord Mayo consigned the Protestants ; and *he* having first *received* mass, as soon as they were a little way from the bridge, fell on the Protestants—some were shot, others were piked, others cast into the river even the ladies were stabbed with the skeins of the ferocious women, who stripped them while lying on the wounded bodies of their husbands and trying to protect them. Sixty-five persons were slaughtered, among whom were two women great with child, and all the clergymen, except the bishop, who was severely wounded, and a Mr. Crowd, who was so beaten on the feet with cudgels, that he died shortly after. It is but just to state, and, indeed, it gives me great pleasure, as I have spoken of this horrible transaction at all, to relate, that numbers of the Roman Catholic gentry, on hearing of the horrid act, came to the assistance of the survivors ; drove off the ferocious murderers, and carried the sufferers to their houses, and took care of them. Amongst others who exerted themselves in this humane labour, it is pleasant to have to mention, that the old abbot of Ross Reilly, Brian Kilkelly, hastened to the spot, did all he could for the wounded, brought the

bishop's wife and children to his abbey, and for several days entertained them to the best of his means, until they were removed to a more convenient retreat. I hope it is Father Brian Kilkelly's skull that I stole from Ross Reilly. Humane as he was amongst the sons of cruelty, I would keep it in great honour, and respect it as the honoured relic of a kind man, humane amidst bigot monsters. The Lord Mayo, who so unwisely, if not wickedly, gave up the poor Protestants to a notorious rapparee, did not live to answer for his deed. His son, Sir Tibbot Burke, when Cromwell had conquered all, was brought to trial as a participator in the transaction, and was shot, some say most unjustly. He had this against him, that he was possessed of fifty thousand acres ; this was no weak evidence against a nocent papist.

The county Mayo is no improvement on Galway. The hills and even plains become grey instead of green, covered as the surface is with bare limestone ; but you have one advantage, and it is no small one, you have now the noble mountain outline of Connemara and Joyce country before you ; and I was put in mind of the hills of Cumberland, and Westmoreland, as seen from the plains and sandy shores of Lancashire.

Cong certainly is a rare place—it might be called the Irish Arabia Petræa ; but there is this great difference, that our place of stones is also a place of rivers of waters. For here, amongst hills of stones, and valleys of stones, you hear the rushing sound of streams through a multitude of holes, and gullies, and caverns, where waters are now appearing, and then disappearing, until all at once they burst forth from under the rock, and form a rapid river rushing to Lough Corrib larger than the Liffey.

It certainly is a singular sight. To the left of the village you see a strong and turbulent stream gushing through salmon and eel weirs, as it flows with all its turbulent eddies to the lake ; then you look to the north, south, east, and no river is seen, nothing but the great grey ridges of limestone ; and you look closer, and you see enormous springs turning at once great millwheels with the impetuosity and force of their waters as they rise from the earth, and while those springs start up and boil in all directions around you, as you do not know whence they flow, so you do not understand whither they are tending. The fact is, Cong is situated on a neck of land that forms the boundary between Lough Mask and Corrib ; and as the whole district is hollow and cavernous, [1] the waters of the upper lake find their way underground to the lower ; but it is not only that there is a general outflow at Cong of the waters of Lough Mask, but I believe there is a manifestation of other waters—of those that flow from the turloughs and smaller lakes to the north-eastward, for I have been assured that in many of the caves about Cong, through which streams of waters rush, the level of the stream is higher than that of Lough Mask. Be it as it may, the vicinity of Cong is very interesting, and I know not where a curious person might spend a day or two more amusingly, provided he could be prepared for the calls of hunger, for I called at three places in the village before I could get any accommodation, and when I got what was most wretched, and which nothing but strong hunger could have stomached, I was charged more than what I would have paid for good fare at the best hotel in Dublin ; but enough of this, and, reader, do *you* take the hint, and fill your satchel with sandwiches when you go to Cong; but in fact it was petty sessions day here, and all were so occupied about justice matters, that they had not time to think of any thing else.

It is to be observed over all Ireland, how fond the people are of trials and all things connected with litigation. Having asked the owner of the wretched public-house where I stopped, for some person to go with me to the abbey and the caves, he pointed out a lubberly-looking fellow, who, he said, would go and show me all and every thing ; so, for want of better, off we started, and we had not gone far from the inn, when a little boy, all in rags, but with a keen eye, a most intelligent countenance, and limbs as light as a fawn, accosted me :

“ *Plase* your honour take me wid yees in place of that spalpeen—arraah, what will the likes o’ him, the Connemara *baste*, know about Cong—no, *plase* your honour, I know every hole and turn in it—won’t you take me ?—do, God bless you.”

“ Come along, then, my lad ;” so off we went.

“ And where will your honour go first ?— won’t you come to the Pigeon-hole ?” So off we set to the north-ward of the town, near an English mile, and calling at a miserable hut on the road-side, out came as witch-like a hag as I think I ever saw. Her sunken eye, her sallow smoke-dried cheeks, nut-cracker nose and chin—then the all-bony body, over which was negligently thrown an attire altogether in keeping with the face and form—the tattered brown woolsey gown, the short madder-red petticoat ; no shoes or stockings.

On its being announced to her, that gentlemen were come to see the Pigeon’s-hole, out she came with a wisp of straw in one hand, and a lighted sod of turf in the other, and we proceeded down a lane towards the object of our curiosity, which was, in fact, a deep chasm in the limestone waste that extended all around, uncovered by any verdure, and which, every where, presented rock upon rock piled in solemn and grand desolation. All around this chasm there were fringes of wild rose, honey-suckle, purple heath, and the palmated lady fern, and down below was heard the echoing murmur of rushing waters.

The old woman led us to some steps by which we had an easy descent, and at the bottom found ourselves in a cave of considerable magnitude, through which flowed a strong stream of water that seemed alive with trout, and across which was constructed a weir for catching eels ; the sun cast its westerly light down through the chasm ; it was finely in contrast to see the waters in one spot flashing under the sunbeams, and then flowing darkly on, losing themselves in the obscurity of the caverns to which they descended, as with many a moan. To add to the picture, (and a master of *chiaro scuro*, some Teniers or Ostade, would have drawn a fine study from it,) two not uncomely young women were beetling clothes below, and as they stood in the sun-light, with its beams sparkling from their beetles, while with vigorous arms they struck the linen at their feet, and their sturdy strokes sent their many echoes through the cavern—they really formed a fine group. And then came the old woman to perform her function, and it was all-important : she had with her coal, set fire to a wisp drawn from the bundle of straw she carried, and proceeding down along the cavern, far away from where the sun was sending its intrusive beams, she tossed on high her blazing wisp, and having given it sufficient windage, until it lit up fully the dark, mysteriously varied roof, she cast it forth on the waters, and on it went floating and still blazing, carrying forward its light, and discovering on and on the vaults and passages, now high, now low, eddying and whirling, and flashing up its fitful blaze until it was extinguished in the far distance where the stream plunged down and was lost where eye never followed.

I think I have not seen a more picturesque sight than this ;—the sun beams streaming down from heaven above—the waters flashing and foaming—all where the light extended covered with the many-coloured vegetations of moss, fern, and lichens—then the old woman, like Hecate, standing on a rock where the day-light had failed to reach, and tossing high her lurid and Stygian light, which she cast with a sort of infernal grace upon the waters all this was a picture that cannot escape from my memory. This woman, Babby Burke by name, I hope will long live to be the appropriate accompaniment of this cave, it would be no *show* without her—she is a garrulous and self-sufficient old hag, as she ought to be, and is privileged to have the exclusive right of showing off the cavern, and of burning her wisps of straw to illuminate it.

She was civil and contented with what she got, and there have been few show places where I grudged less the piece of silver I gave to the poor old woman, who really forms much of the curiosity of the place.

In returning from the cavern towards the village we took our way through a ravine which was very curious. On either side were the verdureless hills covered with the grey rocks tumbled over each other in wild confusion. This hollow seemed to have once been the bed of a great river, and through which the waters of Lough Mask and all the drainage of the country to the north-east must have flowed before it found the passage under ground. In many spots you still come upon a chasm, where, far below, you hear and see a dark stream, urging on its way. On our return to the village we went to see the Abbey, and were accompanied by the little boy, Padsey Lee, and the Connemara man. Here, also, an old woman made her appearance to show us the ruins, and ruins truly, they were. I have seldom, indeed, seen a place so dilapidated. I was not only disappointed but vexed to see it so overthrown and dismantled. It was one of the most celebrated and ancient abbeys in the island, built by Saint Fechin in the seventh century, who called it his *own* monastery, though he afterwards migrated and fixed himself at Fore, in the province of Leinster ; and small blame to him, for who would not prefer the green pastures of Westmeath to the grey rocks of Mayo : yet as founded by this venerable saint of great celebrity, (and truly he was a great man, if we are to believe all that Irish hagiologists say of him,) I question if any other was so thaumaturgic. What think you, reader, of his sending water right through a hill, to turn his monastery mill ? But that was not so strange—he might have got the idea here at Cong, and it was not very much out of the way to teach a Westmeath river what was so natural to a Mayo one. But what shall be said of his stopping for a whole Sunday the river Liffey from flowing over the salmon-leap at Leixlip. It was also a pleasant feat of his turning a fellow with an ugly phiz into a downright beauty ; or of his causing a man who in his simplicity went to procure milk for the convent—but I think I may as well leave this absurdity couched in the dead language in which the friarly historian delights,

“ Cum vir sanctus qui ancillas ad communia monasterii ministeria non admittebat, mandaret Pastolio Coco suo ut vaccas illas mulgerit, vir Columbinæ innocentiae Pastolus, postquam vaccas emulsit, accessit ad TAURUM sancta simplicitate existimans Taurum uti et vaccas lac solere reddere. Quod autem Tauro negavit natura, opifex naturæ in gratiam tantæ innocentiae benigne licessit, ita quod præbuerit tantum lactis quantum septem illæ vaccæ.”
—*Colgan's Acta Sanctorum*. p. 137.

And now, as I have come to look at Cong, one of the most famous, and yet wasted abbeys [2] in Ireland, I would make an observation or two which I may obtrude upon the reader here as well as any where else, that though the Connaught abbeys suffered less waste and demolition from those who originally suppressed them, the busy and fond superstition that turned their interior into places of much-desired sepulture, has defaced and destroyed what the avarice of Henry's courtiers and the curse of Cromwell had spared ; and so as there is now no one to care for and protect an Irish abbey, it, instead of being allowed to repose in the much respected solitude of a Tintern, a Bolton, or Fountains in England, it is now any thing but beautiful, it is not even decent ; the “ *genius loci* ” outraged, we might almost personify as weeping, while all around is disgraced and desecrated. Here pigs rooting, there the village boys rioting and throwing stones, making every venerable ornament their butt ; every where the rank and noisome weeds luxuriating amidst skulls, thigh-bones, pieces of coffins tossed all about—yes, the once fine and elaborated tombs of abbots, prelates and nobles, wilfully defaced, or torn away to form head-stones, and uncouth ornaments of the graves where the “ rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep ; ” and it is not the tomb alone that is rifled, but the mullioned windows, the fanciful corbels and capitals, the curious interlacings of the groined arches—all, all are torn down with an utter recklessness of the consequent ruin, and so *now* a

noble pillar comes down, and anon a fretted window, the master-piece of the most elaborate chiselling, to decorate, ay decorate, as a jewel of gold, a swine's snout, the grave of some village Paddy, who will not there be left to rot unmolested for three years, until his bones are to be tossed up to make room for some other Paddy, or Biddy, whose remains *must*, for the benefit of their poor *sowls*, find a rest in such holy ground. I say, that whoever enters an Irish abbey, let him be Protestant or Romanist, must sigh for some law appointing conservators able to restrain the ignorant and reckless hands that are, day after day, obliterating the religious monuments of the island.

And here let me be allowed another remark respecting the, to me, evident difference that exists between the monastic remains previous and subsequent to the Anglo-Norman conquest. Of the former we find no remains that were devoted not to directly religious worship, churches, oratories, crypts, and shrines, (except the round towers, [3] which alone seem to have answered any secular purpose ;) the old Irish monastic, in his Culdee simplicity, was contented with his little hermitage composed of wattles, his humble [4] cell of living on the milk of a few cows and the fish that the adjoining river (as at Cong) abundantly supplied; enough for him was the conviction that at the approach of the barbarous spoiler he could retreat, with his vestments and holy things, by means of a ladder, into the round tower, through its high-placed door ; from thence to see his humble cell committed to the flames, there to bear the privations he was so well accustomed to, until the ravagers retreated and “ the tyranny was overpast.”

But to return to Cong : I had observed that this abbey is all dilapidated ; here, as I was informed, was the tomb of Roderick O'Connor, the unfortunate king of Ireland, who, failing of driving out the Anglo-Norman invaders, retired to Cong, to spend the last fifteen years of his life : a fit place, amongst its rocks, and caverns, and dark-flowing streams, to sigh away a life which no longer could serve his country.

Some fellow dreamt that there was treasure buried under the wall adjoining O'Connor's tomb, and he came by night to dig for it. Instead of finding the money, he threw down the whole wall, nearly killed himself, and overwhelmed what was *said* to be O'Connor's tomb ; what was said, I repeat, because I believe Roderick was not buried here at all—I was shown his tomb in two other places, at Roscommon and Clonmacnoise. I consider the last as having the honour of holding his remains. My little guide, Padsey, when I expressed my disappointment at not seeing a king's tomb, did his best to console me—“ Come, sir, and I will show where a great man entirely entirely was buried, and his mare also.”

“ And who is that, Padsey ?”

“ Why Macnamara the robber and his mare Moreen.”

“ Well, come show me his grave.” So over rubbish and skulls, and through rank nettles and the roots of dwarf elder, we scrambled until we came to a corner, where was nothing to be seen but a common slabstone.

“ Well now Padsey, tell me all about this Macnamara.”

“ Why, sir, he was a terrible man—I believe he was from the county Clare—but any how he kept in those parts, for the sake of the caves, and it's very near the mountains, where he could run to when things came to the worst with him; and he robbed the world from Munster up to Sligo ; and after all it was not himself that was great, but his mare—for she was the jewel of a crathur—he'd rob a man in the county of Clare, and Moreen, the mare, would carry him off in such a jiffey that he'd be here in no time. He saved his life in that way. They

swore he robbed a man near Limerick ; *he* swore and proved it too, that he slept that night in Cong ; the judge said it was impossible he could so shortly be in two places—barring he was a bird—it was certainly true for him, only that it was Moreen that carried him through. Oh, sir, sure Moreen could lep any where—she lepped up with Macnamara on her back, into a drawing-room window, where a company of Galway squires were carousing, and he robbed them all, and then he bounced out again. But the same Moreen did more than ever she did, one day in Joyce country. Macnamara made the snug farmers amongst the mountains pay him what he called his black rint ; and once on a time when he was hunted out of all the flat country and the sodgers were after him from Tuam and Castlebar, and Ballinrobe, and he was here amongst the caves and rocks ; so he bethought him of gathering his rint in Joyce country, and off he set to the foot of Mamturb mountain, and he was mighty cross all out, and not a thing would he have but the cash, no meal or malt would do him, and gold he must have that was scarce ; so one said, and another said, is it not a queer thing that all of us should be paying to this rapparee rapscallion—(not a people in the wide world fonder of money than these Joyces)—and he, after all, but one little man, not so big as any one of ourselves ; so they all rose, and they shouted, and they ran at him, and one man had his scythe, and the other his loy, and the other his stone, and they were going to murther him, and they had him hemmed in ; on one side was Lough Corrib, and on the other was a high rock and a big Joyce was lifting his loy to split his skull, when Macnamara gave a chirp to Moreen, and up she sprung, thirty feet in height was the rock, she made no more of it than she would of skipping over a potato trench ; she brought him out of their reach in a thrice, and him she carried to Cong, as safe as you are, master, and safer ; the marks of where she landed up on the rock are there yet the people will shew it you, if you go that way, not a word of lie in it ; but may be, your honour, I have tired you about Mac and Moreen.”

“ Oh, no, Padsey, have you any thing more to say ?”

“ Och, then, that I have ; sure he once sold his mare, for he was a great card-player, and so it was he lost all he could rap or run; the devil’s child, that he was, he staked and lost poor Moreen, and if you were to see him next day when the man came to carry her away, it would make your heart sick ; so, says he to her owner, sir, would you be pleased just for to give me one ride of her before she goes, I’ll be bound I’ll show you what’s in her. So sir, do you see yonder piers ?”—and here Paddy pointed to an ancient gateway where there were the remains of very lofty piers,—“ Sir, the gate was up at this time higher far than a man would reach—so Mac mounted, and dashed Moreen at the gate, and sure enough she topped it in style ; but if she did, whether it was that the knowing crathur had a thought in her that her master was going to give her up or not—any how myself cannot tell, but when she came to the ground she fell down as dead and never rose again. Poor Moreen’s heart was broke ! and poor Macnamara did not long survive her ; he ordered himself to be buried along with her, in that snug corner, and there they are, and never was the likes of man and mare from that day to this.”

“ Well now, Padsey, would you like to be such a one as Macnamara ?”

“ Oh then to be sure I would, but where would the likes of me get such a mare as Moreen ?”

We did not remain long at the abbey in fact there was nothing worth seeing in it, except three beautiful windows, or rather skreens that once divided the southern transept of the church from the cloister ; if the whole cloister, which is now a thickly planted orchard, were as highly ornamented as this, it must have been beautiful—the carving here is most elaborately executed, and what remains forms a fine specimen of the interfacings of a florid Gothic window.

In departing from the abbey, and giving sixpence to the stupid old woman who appeared at its gate, I asked Padsey had he any thing more to show ?

“ Oh yes, plase your honour, plenty—come and I’ll shew you the Robber’s hole !”

“ What’s that ?”

“ Och then come along, and when I bring you to it, I’ll do my endeavour to make you sinsible.”—So, accompanied by my boy and my Connemara man, we again passed through the village, and entered the wild waste of rock that lay to the eastward ; and we had not gone far until we came to a chasm about ten feet long by four wide, down which, when you looked, you saw and heard below, about one hundred feet, a stream urging its course.

“ This, sir,” (said Padsey,) “ is the Robber’s hole.”

“ And why has it got that name ?”

“ Oh sir, from a great man entirely that made use of this place.”

“ Was it Macnamara ?”

“ Oh no, but one of his sort—though not with his heart—for Mac, they say, was kind of heart, but this fellow was the very divil all out—now, your honour, just give me time and I’ll tell yees. He was the greatest robber and murtherer that ever was known in Connaught—’twas death and destruction to travel in those days between Tuam and Ballinrobe. His way was to seize the traveller, and then bring him off the road to this hole, and here rob and strip him, and then toss him down where no one could go look after the corpse, or ever hear what became of it. In this way he stopped a fine lady who was travelling in a shay, dressed out in a gold-laced scarlet coat—a beautiful creature, going as they say to meet her husband, a great officer, who was quartered in Castlebar—well, Davy the divil, as the robber was called, stopped her on the road not far from this town, and he brought her up here to put an end to her—here, sir, the two were—she, I may say, where I now stand, and Davy beside her ; and Davy says, ‘ Come, mistress, strip off your finery, before you go down where I will send you.’ ‘ And where is that, sir ?’ says she, mighty civil all out—for the crathur saw she was in a villain’s power—‘ down in *that* hole you must go, so make haste, my deary, and strip in a thrice, or may be it will be worse for yes ;’—‘ wont you let me say my prayers ?’ says the lady.—‘ Well, and that I wont,’ says Davy, ‘ seeing that I know by your cut you’re a Protestan heretic—and all the prayers in the priest’s book would do you no good.’ So the lady began to strip, but you may be sure she did it slow enough, for still she gave a long look over the grey rocks to see if any one would come to save her—but there was no crathur in sight but the sheep—and no voice but the raven croaking high and hoarse, as if by some sense he smelled of one that was about to die. Well, my lady had taken off her bright scarlet gown, and her fine hat and feathers ; and there was her beautiful hair streaming in the air ; and all she had now on was a little bit of a petticoat and *she-miss*, (as the quality people call it,) of fine linen, as white as a snow-drift on Mamturb. And now *here* stood the lady, and there just where your honour stands was the robber, and at his foot, as you now see it, this dark deep running water. Well, sir, said the lady, ‘ Mr. Robber, sure you are a dacent man, and for civility sake you would not be after looking at a lady when she is doing what you are *now* forcing her to ?’ ‘ Oh no, by no manner of means,’ says the robber—‘ I’m a dacent man at *any rate*,’—so, sir, very mannerly all out, Davy the divil turned his back on the lady, and then, as sure as you are there, my lady gives Davy a push and down he goes, with a crash, just as I now push this Connemara boy into this hole, down, down !” and sure enough Padsey did give the Connemara man a push, which did not actually send him down body and bones, as went the

robber, but taken as he was by surprise, the poor fellow's hat went down, and I never saw a being so astonished as the Connemara man was when he saw his hat go down where, if we are to believe Padsey's story of the robber, many a good head went down before now. I could not find from Padsey what became of the lady, whose presence of mind stood her in such good stead ; all I know is, that after enjoying a hearty laugh at the stolid surprise, and subsequent distress, of the mountaineer, at the loss of the hat, which he declared was nearly new—and when he, almost crying, said he could never face home without his hat, for all the neighbours would be after laughing at him, I had to give him money to buy a new one, and he and I parted ; and I dare say little Padsey, when he went home in the evening, enjoyed a hearty laugh at our joint expense, being both in his view simples—one for going in the way of losing his hat, and the other in paying for an old *caubeen* as if it were a new Felt fresh from the block.

I had a longing desire to see some of the rare relics which I understood were still preserved in Cong, as belonging to the abbot of this once rich and far-famed monastery. I understood from the old woman who showed me the abbey, that Father Prendergast was the last lord abbot, and that no one had been appointed to fill his place. I was also informed that Sir Richard O'Donnell claimed to be the representative of these once mitred abbots, and in fact was the owner of the property, as the lay impropiator, not only of the tithes but the lands of the abbey. Knowing that the gentleman was a sectarian, I could not but wonder at the absurdity of one who would consider himself as representative of the abbots of Cong, and at the same time renounce all clerical distinctions—what would St. Fechin or St. Brendan say to this ? But I had heard much of the relics that were in the possession of these extinct abbots, and was informed that a widow-woman, of the name of Moran, in the town, who kept a shop, had possession of them—but I was not so fortunate as to be allowed to inspect them. I called at the house, but met with a very sulky reception. As I said before, all minds were occupied with the petty sessions, and my jaunting-car equipage was not sufficiently imposing to excite an interest in my favour. [5] But though seeing is believing, and is, I may say, the only means of good describing—yet I have been consoled for my loss by the account given me by my friends, Sir W. Betham and Mr. Petrie, who were much better able to appreciate, describe and account for them than I am. The relics I allude to consist of the primatial crozier of the Archbishop of Connaught, and a reliquary containing a tooth of St. Patrick—both invaluable, and from both hang tales or histories, *if you will*, of no small importance ; for the Pope wishing to reduce Ireland to a conformity both in doctrine and discipline with the Church of Rome, sent over a cardinal with a piece of the true cross, the highest possible mark of papal affection, to Turlough O'Connor, king of Ireland, who, flattered by the gift, did his best to induce the Irish prelates to receive four archbishops from the pope, who marked them as his subjects by *his* sending and *their* accepting Palls, as the insignia of their submission to the sovereign pontiff. Turlough, instead of consigning the priceless relic to the care of the archbishop of Armagh, consigned it to the archbishop of Connaught, intending thereby to show that as the king of Connaught was monarch of all Ireland, so the archbishop of Connaught should be its primate. But be it as it may, the pope must have had, and I think deservedly, a poor opinion of Irish intellect, when he tried, and that successfully, to make them his subjects by the gift of a wooden chip, and subsequently could raise O'Neil into a rebellion by sending him a peacock's feather. This primatial cross, it may be presumed, was left by King Roderick O'Connor, in the keeping of the abbot of Cong, when after fifteen years' residence he departed this life in this abbey. The other relic is still more extraordinary. It is about twelve inches square, and somewhat like the ornamented outside of a lady's reticule, having figures raised in relief on it, and altogether it is a very elaborate affair. Not long ago Sir William Betham exhibited an exact model of it before the Royal Irish Academy, and no doubt in the next volume of that society's transactions we shall have a print of it. But the contents are much more important than the case, for it covers “ a tooth of St. Patrick.” Now every body should know that whenever this enlightened man opened his mouth, out came a stream of

light as from the open door of a blast furnace which illuminated all around—and so it was that while St. Patrick was on a visit to St. Brone, who blessed with his abode the fertile peninsula that is formed by the bays of Sligo and Ballysodare, and concerning which we intend, by and by, to say somewhat more—well, while Patrick, as needs must, not only opened his mouth to take in and to give out—for he eat, and taught—whether in the act of delighting himself or in enlightening the world, out fell one of his teeth ; and as it fell to the ground it shone like a glow-worm in the night, and St. Brone picked up the precious treasure, had it set in its present beautiful case, and it not only served as a memento of Ireland's apostle when he passed away to bless and enlighten other coasts, but it was a means of grace and healing ever after. But in process of time the precious relic ceased to be in the possession of those who would, or could, use it for gracious purposes, and in the latter days it was in the keeping of a layman who used it for magical purposes, and some say he employed it in the indulgence of his bad and sensual passions—for so it was that he who owned it could render himself very amiable in the eyes of those whom it was his desire to please. Now, Father Prendergast, the abbot of Cong, hearing of all this, determined to snatch this heavenly thing from the hands of a child of the devil ; so he calls on the man and pretends to be mighty curious to see and handle this wonderful relic, and the owner very civilly gave it to him to look at, and behold you, the moment good Father Prendergast got hold of it he clapped it in his pocket, and no threat or entreaty could persuade him to give it up. “ This holy thing (says Prendergast) is not yours—you can show no title to it, and I can : for Patrick was an Augustinian monk and so am I—what was his is mine, for our order have all things in common—*ergo*, his tooth is my tooth—so, sirrah, go about your business with this be satisfied, that it is now, where it ought to be, in *good* hands.” We cannot say whether the man who was thus evicted of his property, remained content, but this is certain, that Prendergast kept it, and as the last abbot of Cong, he willed it to a widow woman, who now has it in her keeping.

By the way, this same Prendergast had an old chest in which were preserved, during the dark and dangerous days of the penal laws, not only the primatial crozier, but sundry parchments and MSS. of which he knew not the use, for at the time he was a sorry scholar, and he thought more of questing, station-holding, and confessing, than of studying—and by-and-by he had occasion to go to Rome, and amongst other things belonging to himself and his abbey, he left the chest in charge of his coadjutor, who was about as learned as himself. But Prendergast, while at Rome, observed, that in the college of the Propaganda and in the Vatican there was great value set upon just such old musty parchments as were at home in his own chest, and he began to talk of his property to some of his friends of the Irish college, and his eyes were opened, and he longed to be back at Cong, in order that he might inspect what he now considered to be a treasure ; and when he did return, the first thing he inquired about was his old chest. But alas! though the chest was there, its contents were dissipated—for, unfortunately, the curate's brother was a tailor, and these old parchments, though here and there a little rotten, were found to make good measures, so one after another they were cut into strips, the coadjutor, all the time, admiring how such useless rubbish could be turned by his industrious brother to such a good and professional account. And at the same time he was a careful soul and tasty, for while he enriched his brother with the written parchments, he carefully cut out all the illuminations and pictures and pasted them in a book, just like a young lady's album, and it was with no small self-gratification he showed this handy work to his principal on his return from foreign parts.

I left Cong with regret, for though I had seen much that interested me, yet I felt assured that had I time and opportunity I might have seen and heard much more. It is a pity there is not a good inn here ; I don't know any place where a person in search of curious and interesting scenery could spend time more to his satisfaction ; and to those fond of angling I should suppose no place could afford more sport. I have observed that there was held a petty session, and much people were congregated in the village. Before our departure the driver of our

jaunting car overheard some men, in very passionate terms, express their determination to overtake (by making a short cut) a person who had gone in the direction of Joyce's country, and who, it seems, had got the better of them in a cause that had been just decided by the magistrates. It may be right to mention that our driver happened to be a northern Protestant, who, by some chance, had fixed his lot in a Connaught inn. So when we were clear of the village, our man made us acquainted with the conspiracy he had overheard, and suggested that it would be a humane thing to take up the poor fellow on our car, and get on so as to disappoint the men who intended to overtake him ; this we most willingly agreed to, and by-and-by we came up to a little small dapper man, not at all dressed like a Connaught man, but rather like a Dublin tradesman ; he was accompanied by a tall, comely, and flashingly dressed female, and they were trudging along as fast as they could, for though the man was not aware of all his danger, yet he felt he was not very safe ; upon overtaking him he was told what was before him, and I think I never saw a person more alarmed, or more rejoiced when we offered to take him up with us on the car. But then he hesitated : said he did not like to leave his wife, (for so she was,) and he could not ask us to encumber ourselves with her ; but though we did not reckon on this addition to our already heavily laden vehicle, yet there could be no hesitation ; so up we took them both and pushed on. The man proved to be a native of Tyrone, from the very same town of which our driver was ; the woman, a Dublin lass he had fallen in love with, and married at a short notice; and this Sally of our alley was as unfit and as ill-disposed to rough it through Connaught as could well be imagined. She sat on my side of the car, and her whole conversation was a sigh after the teapots and the idleness of the alley out of which she had been allured. Her husband was employed in a very subordinate capacity in the Ordnance survey, and the people who had summoned him to the sessions at Cong, had brought a charge against him for assistance they had afforded him in measuring by chain the side of a mountain. His defence was, that the men being perfectly idle had offered him their services for nothing, and that moreover it was not he that was bound to pay them but his superiors ; this defence the magistrates had decreed valid, and it was decided that he was not bound to pay them. Getting onwards, as we did at a brisk rate, we at length came to the turn where the short cut from Cong met the road, and there, sure enough, we found four stout fellows, each with a good blackthorn stick in his hand, and certainly had they caught the narrow shouldered Tyrone man by himself they would have finished him. I never saw a set of fellows so apparently overreached, or who looked so crest-fallen as they did when our car drove by. The driver at once recognized them as those whom he had over-heard, but they gave us no opposition, and for the best reason, they saw we were as many as they, and we had good sticks too, as all should have who intend to walk over rough and rocky mountains. By-and-by we came to a village where was a station of the people employed in the survey, and there we deposited our well escaped companions and passed on.

[1] Is it the case that limestone formations are more cavernous when in the vicinity of primitive and transition districts ? Cong is close to the primitive district of Joyce Country. The Caves of Mitchelstown are within a short distance of the Galtee range.

[2] I may as well here remark, that one of the causes (independent of inferior wealth) why Irish abbeys are not so elaborately ornamented as the English and French, arises from the difficulty of carving the Irish material. In France and England they had the oolite and new red sand-stone to work on, out of which they might with comparative ease carve any tracery ; but it is not so with the stone the Irish artists could command. Our limestone, though the most permanent, is the most difficult stone to cut.

[3] " I must here add an anecdote I met with in a Welch manuscript of the Gwydir family, in North Wales, in which it appears that so late as the year 1600 the common Welch were so wild that Sir John Wynn, when he went to church, was forced always to have a watchman

on an eminence whence he could see both his house and the church. His duty was, if he saw any attack made on the former, though it was always left bolted and guarded during church time, to sound an alarm. This anecdote naturally suggests a manifest use of the round towers in Ireland ; for the castle, for such was every gentleman's house, almost always stood near a church, and consequently in a country much more wild than Wales, a watchman on the top of one of these towers must have been of the greatest advantage to give alarm. I am not singular in this opinion, both Earl Morton and Bishop Pacocke concur with me the latter had seen a long trumpet which was dug from the bottom of one of these towers.”—*Brereton's Paper on Round Towers, 2 vul. Archaelogia.*

Mr. Brereton is mistaken in supposing that at the period of the erection of the round towers there were any castles in Ireland. But what he says applies to the ecclesiastics dwelling around their churches. A watchman in a tower must in such a country be needful. We find that at this day in Syria and Palestine the monasteries have such towers ; having, as the Irish, high-placed narrow entrances, only accessible by a draw-up ladder, in which a watchman is constantly on the look out.

[4] In a lake, drained some years ago, in the vicinity of Kilmacduagh, was found at the bottom a sort of but composed of perishable materials ; split oak, with the interstices filled with wattles and plastered with mud it may be supposed that this was the place of repose of one of the religious of that establishment.

[5] I have since seen the crozier, and certainly it is a beautiful and elaborate specimen of the advanced state of the metallurgic arts in Ireland previous to the English conquest. The name of the artist is inscribed in Irish characters on it, and I very much question whether in the present day any one mechanic could be found in Ireland capable of executing such a work. The fact is, that all over Europe, even in what were called the dark ages, the arts conducive to the ornament and splendour of the church were carried on in the monastic cloisters ; to these labours the monks dedicated themselves, and though there was much barbarism without, the arts were cultivated within the church, and for its use. Of this crozier it is needless for me to say more ; before this volume comes before the public, a description will be published of it by a much more able pen.

A tour in Connaught : comprising sketches of Clonmacnoise, Joyce country, and Achill (1839)

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