

Ennis & Limerick 1834

A Journey Throughout Ireland, During the Spring, Summer, and Autumn of 1834

David Inglis Henry

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I looked around me with the same curiosity and interest which I have been accustomed to feel on setting foot on other foreign lands ; for my ignorance of Ireland might well justify me in looking upon Ireland as a foreign land, and upon her people as foreigners. This I consider an advantage : for unless a country be so regarded, I question if the traveller will be likely to record those minute and common things, which often throw so much light upon the genius and condition of a people ; and by the omission of which, the graphic character of a work is so much impaired.

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It was this morning, that, for the first time, I saw that noblest of all rivers in the British European dominions—the Shannon. It was impossible to look upon the Shannon without feeling deeply interested ; and this for many reasons. I knew it to be the greatest of all our rivers ; I knew it to be a great artery, by means of which, improvement might be carried, and capital circulated, through the remotest parts of Ireland ; I saw it to be in itself, a noble stream, rivalling the finest of the continental rivers ; and an additional interest was communicated to it, from the belief that, to my countrymen, that part of Ireland lying to the west of the Shannon, is a *terra incognita*.

But as I shall, for some time, have frequent occasion to speak of the Shannon, and as it will be our companion during a considerable part of this journey, I will here speak a little more in detail of this noble river ; and, in doing so, I shall not scruple to avail myself of the valuable information given by Mr. Williams, in a pamphlet published by him, upon the internal navigation of Ireland.

The source of the Shannon is reputed to be Loch Allen : but some say, and I have no doubt those who say so are right, that Loch Allen has its feeders, and they therefore, though incorrectly perhaps, place the source of the Shannon higher than Loch Allen. By and by, I shall visit Loch Allen, and shall probably then be able to tell more accurately which is the source of the Shannon. The course of the river is two hundred and thirty-four miles ; and the most singular feature about this great river is, that throughout its whole course, it possesses a sufficient depth of water for the purposes of internal intercourse. With some trifling interruptions, it is navigable from its mouth to its source. The other singular characteristic of this river is, its extraordinary diversity. It is partly river, and partly lake. In the upper part of its course, it expands into two great lakes, Lough Derg, and Lough Ree, each of them twenty miles in length,—and forms, in its course from Leitrim to Limerick, many smaller lakes, varying from one to three miles in length. Below Limerick, to the sea, a distance of sixty miles, it forms a magnificent estuary, varying in breadth, from one to eight miles, and capable of bearing to the quay of Limerick, a vessel of 400 tons burden. The whole fall of the river amounts to 146 feet 10 inches. Mr. Williams says, “ From the circumstance of the Shannon running through the centre of the kingdom, it may be compared, for the purposes of intercourse, to double that length of coast.”

The Shannon washes the shores of no fewer than ten counties,—Leitrim, Roscommon, Longford, Westmeath, King’s County, Galway, Tipperary, Clare, Limerick, and Kerry.

“ How,” says Mr. Williams, “ can we convey to English eyes, the picture of the Shannon through its great course ?” The fact is, there is nothing more required than to glance at a good map of Ireland in order to obtain a tolerable notion of the nature and extent of this noble river, and of its value, as a means of improvement. I trust the reader will become better acquainted with the Shannon, as he proceeds with me on my journey ; and that when we stand together near to its source, we shall almost be able to write a pamphlet on it ourselves.

It was on approaching Tarbert, that I ran into this digression on the Shannon. I now resume my narrative.

Tarbert is a very small town, situated at the head of a little bay of the Shannon, which, from the entrance to Tarbert Bay, to the nearest point of the opposite coast of Clare, is about two and a half miles abroad. Tarbert Bay is prettily wooded ; and the banks of the river, below Tarbert, are adorned by several handsome seats. It was Sunday, and I had an opportunity of seeing the peasantry of this neighbourhood, with holiday looks, and holiday clothes. I saw more incongruity of apparel here, than I had anywhere else seen ; and a greater partiality for gaudy colours. Red petticoats, and bright yellow shawls, were much in vogue ; and so smart were the women's caps, that every hood was thrown back, to let them be seen. It was singular enough to see some tolerably neat holiday apparel, accompanied by bare feet and legs ; I fear it was not the will that consented—for although it is no doubt often matter of choice to go barefooted, yet this certainly could not have been the case on Sunday.

I have already spoken of the goodness of the Irish inns. My remarks, however, were made before I had travelled into the remoter parts of the country ; and when I remarked to any Irish person, that I had found the inns better than I expected, I was told to suspend my judgment until I had visited the less frequented parts of the country. I have now travelled through the remotest extremities of the wilds of Kerry ; and I find no reason to retract the opinion I expressed. At Kenmare, at Cahirsiveen, at Dingle, at Listowel, and now at Tarbert, I found comfortable, and clean inns. I have at this inn, a well and newly carpeted room, with good mahogany chairs, three excellent mahogany tables, a handsome glass over the chimney piece, clean chintz window curtains, white blinds, and the walls of the room well papered. My bedroom is as unexceptionable and every thing is comfortably served up at table. Prices continue nearly the same : dinner is generally charged 2*s.*, tea 1*s.*, breakfast 1*s.* 3*d.*, bed 1*s.* 8*d.*, and whiskey 5*d.* per glass, with water and sugar.

I spent the afternoon in walking five or six miles down the shore of the Shannon, as far as Ardmore point. The evening was remarkably fine, and the atmosphere clear ; so that the whole of the opposite coast of Clare, as far as Kilrush, was beautifully distinct ; and I was able even to see clearly, the round tower on Scatterry Island.

The reader, probably, knows, that there is a steam navigation on the Shannon, both above and below Limerick. One of the Company's vessels plies between Limerick and Kilrush, and takes passengers from Tarbert, if any there be ; and I, of course, took advantage of it the next day, to go up to Limerick. In order to embark, it is necessary to walk to Tarbert Island, a mile distant ; but there is some talk of constructing a pier, either at Tarbert, or at Glyn, a village a mile or two farther up the river. The fares on the Shannon are very moderate ; the distance from Tarbert to Limerick, is thirty-five miles, and the fare is 4*s.* The vessels, too, are excellent, and in every way well appointed. Soon after leaving Tarbert, the river contracts ; for on the Clare side, a narrow headland pushes itself far into the river. The Clare side is here sloping and cultivated, without much wood, which is more abundant on the other side of the river ; and on the Kerry side, the bank is also adorned by several villas. Two or three miles above Tarbert, we were opposite to Glyn village, and to the very handsome residence of the Knight of Glyn, with its fine woods around it. The village looks neat and clean from the water ; and the church on a neighbouring height, is a very pretty object. Here, the county of Kerry ends, and Limerick county begins.

On the Clare side the river now forms a wide bay, called Labeshida Bay ; and the banks, both on the Clare and Limerick side, exhibit the same features, until we reach Loghill. It is, I believe, on this part of the Shannon, that the real incidents which gave rise to the excellent novel, called "The Collegians," took place ; and that the real Elie O'Connor was betrayed and drowned. On both sides, the banks of the Shannon are beautiful beyond Loghill. On the Limerick side, situated on a green eminence near to the river, is Mount Trenchard, the seat of Mr. Spring Rice ; and opposite, on the Clare side, the beautiful domain of Cahircon, with its deep bay, and mansion buried among woods.

Soon after passing Mount Trenchard we reached Foynes Island, the property of Lord Dunraven ; and immediately afterwards, Achinish Island, which however, is not an island, unless in extra-

ordinarily high tides. These are both on the Limerick side of the river, which now, on the other side expands into the fine estuary, which reaches far into the county of Clare, and is studded with grassy islands of the most beautiful greenness, covered with innumerable cattle. The view was here most captivating. The deep woods of Cahircon and Mount Trenchard were behind ; the green islands and more distant hills of Clare, on one side, with the estuary of the river Fergus stretching far to the left ; while on the Limerick side, a recess in the banks shewed, at a little distance, the town and castle of Askeaton ; and at a greater distance, “ the Hill of Truth,” so celebrated throughout this part of the country, as the resort of the fairies, or “ good people.” The view of this hill, gave rise to some conversation touching the good people ; and the man at the helm, entertained his auditors with many stories of fairies,—in the existence of whom, he evidently entertained the firmest belief.

The river, after we passed the estuary of the Fergus, suddenly contracts to about a mile and a half wide ; and Begh Castle, an old black ruin, and near to it, the domain of Castletown, and still farther, the fine ruin, called Carrig-aguinal Castle, situated on a bold rock, present themselves successively. These are all on the Limerick side ; but on the side of Clare, the objects of attraction are still finer—particularly Bunratty Castle ; which, together with a new mansion, lies in a deep recess, surrounded by wood, and with fine green slopes behind.

All the remainder of the distance to Limerick, the views are full of beauty. High, sloping, and finely cultivated hills, a little back from the river ; with handsome houses, and more than one old ruin nearer to the banks, are seen on the Clare side ; while Cooper Hill, and Tervac, two fine domains, lie embosomed in wood on the other bank. The river has now gradually contracted ; and the two last of its reaches, up to Limerick, are not more than from a quarter to three quarters of a mile in breadth. Limerick is not seen, until the last reach of the river be entered ; and owing to the absence of spires and architectural eminences, the city does not shew to great advantage.

My object being to reach Ennis, the county town of Clare, about twenty-six miles from Limerick, I did little more than step out of the steam vessel, and into a car ; and at present, therefore, I shall say nothing of the city, until my return from Ennis.

The first part of the road to Ennis, embraces nearly the same views as the voyage up the Shannon ; for the road runs parallel to, though at a little distance from the river. From several of the eminences over which I passed, a great part of the course of the lower Shannon is laid open ; and the country on either side of the road was green, fertile, and beautiful. Several of the ruins which are seen from the river,—particularly Bunratty Castle,—I passed close by ; and several fine domains,—among others, that belonging to Sir Edward O’Brien, lay in our way.

The little town of Clare, which from its situation ought to be the county town, in place of Ennis, lies between Limerick and Ennis, and only about two miles from the latter. There is a fine navigation up the estuary of the river Fergus, to the bridge of Clare ; so that Clare is the export point of the Ennis market. A very trifling expenditure would extend the water communication to Ennis ; and there is no doubt, that, in that event, the prosperity of the town would rapidly increase ; for Clare is not only a fine corn country, but an extensive cattle-breeding country. The proposal of a canal, however, has met with every opposition from narrow-mindedness and jobbing. The great Ennis proprietor likes nothing that costs anything ; and the proprietor of Clare is not of course anxious to remove the point of export from Clare to Ennis. Notwithstanding the advantages possessed by Clare, the place looks poverty-stricken.

I reached Ennis just as it fell dark ; and found the town in all the bustle that in an Irish county town, precedes the holding of assizes : the inns were all choke full ; and for lodgings, the most exorbitant prices were demanded. From three to eight guineas, for a few days, were asked for two rooms ; and I was glad to find a place to creep into, even on these terms. Although the assize was opened on the following day, no business was entered upon, until the day after ; and I therefore employed the interval in those perambulations, scrutinies, and inquiries, which occupy a part of my attention in every town.

I had not yet seen, in Ireland, any town with suburbs so extensive, in comparison with the town itself ; or, perhaps, it would be more correct to say, that I had not seen any town with so few good streets, in comparison with the bad ; for the rows and streets of cabins form, in fact, the greater part of the town, and cannot properly be called suburbs. There is not, indeed, one good street in Ennis ; and there are only two streets which rise above the rank of lanes. Ennis, however, is a populous town, containing 12,000 inhabitants ; and is susceptible of considerable improvement in many ways, but especially by the construction of some communication with the river navigation at Clare.

The retail trade in Ennis is not extensive, excepting in the necessaries of life. Limerick is so near, and the communication with it so frequent and so easy, that it absorbs a great part of the retail trade of the county of Clare.

I have nowhere yet found land let dearer, or its small occupiers in a poorer condition, than in the neighbourhood of Ennis. I found average good land, but by no means first rate land, situated about a mile from the town, let at 7*l.* and 8*l.* per acre ; and very indifferent land, as far and even at a greater distance from the town, let at 4*l.* and 5*l.* per acre. This is literally squeezing the uttermost farthing out of the soil ; and the proprietor of a large portion of the land in this neighbourhood, a Mr. Gore, is one of those short-sighted individuals, whose object is, to keep up a nominal rent roll, and to let his land to the highest bidder. This gentleman takes no warning by the frequency of unpaid rents, and possessions relinquished ; and finds no difficulty, in the present state of the country, when the demand for improved land is greater than the supply, of letting his land at whatever price he chooses to put upon it. The miserable suburbs of Ennis afford evidence of the same system. I need scarcely add, that there is great want of employment in and about Ennis ; and that nothing is done in the way of providing it.

The country about Ennis offers many beautiful scenes. I would particularly name Eden vale and Eden lake,—spots of great loveliness and repose. But the neighbourhood of such charming scenes as these, too often remind one of Castle Rack-rent—a large neglected looking mansion, and a pack of hounds ; and congregations of miserable cabins scattered around. Clare is a backward county ; little has been done for it ; and in no county, has grand-jury jobbing been more unblushingly carried on.

Clare Assizes—English and Irish Assizes—Description of Cases tried—Fair Murders— Spirit of Faction—Difficulty of eliciting Truth—Disregard of an Oath—Extent to which Faction is carried—A paid Magistracy necessary—Rape Cases—Abduction—Murder— Assaults—Kissing the Book— Superstitions—General Impressions from attending an Irish Assize.

A small Irish county town, during assizes, presents a spectacle that is never seen in England ; for even supposing the calendar to be as long, in an English as in an Irish county,—which it never is,—the difference in the character of the cases to be tried, materially affects the aspect of the town and its population. In England, a case of murder or man-slaughter, brings to the county town only the near relations of the party to be tried,—and perhaps, of the party prosecuting ; but in Ireland, things are on a different scale. The English murder is a private act, perpetrated by some ruffian for the sake of gain : the Irish homicide has been committed for no reason at all ; and not by one cold-blooded ruffian, but by a crowd of demi-barbarians, who meet for the purpose of fighting ; and who have no other reason for fighting, than because one half of the number are called O'Sullivan, and the other O' something else : so that when a manslaughter is to be prosecuted at an Irish assize, the case does not bring up merely the accused and his one or two witnessess, but it brings half the “ boys” in the county who bear the same name as the accused ; and as many more, of the same name as the man who was killed,—every one of the former, ready to kiss the book, and swear, that the boy accused of the homicide, never handled a shillelah, or lifted a stone, or was seen in a “ scrimmage” in his days ; and every one of the latter as ready to swear, that the boy that was killed, was the most peaceable boy that ever bore his name, and that he was killed for no reason at all. Besides these homicides cases, which are peculiar to an Irish assize, prosecutions of any kind bring together a greater number of persons than in England,—for be it a robbery, or a rape, or any other crime, of which a man is accused, all his relations come forward to swear an alibi. It may be easily conceived, therefore, what a motley crowd fills the streets of an Irish county town at the time of an assize.

Nor is it only the number of persons, but their eagerness also, that strikes a stranger. Besides the groups that throng every part of the open streets, and who are always in earnest talk, dense crowds are collected at the door of every attorney's office, and no one of this brother-hood can walk a yard, without having his sleeve pulled by half-a-dozen "boys" or women, all interested for or against somebody ; and entreating his honour to get them justice : which may mean, either to get a man hanged, or to save a man from hanging.

The most numerous class of cases at most Irish assizes, is that which is facetiously denominated *fair* murders ; that is, homicides committed at fairs ; and I do not know any means, by which so much insight is to be obtained into the character of the Irish peasantry, and into the condition of the country, and state of things among the lower classes of society, as by listening to these prosecutions for *fair* murders. There were many of these prosecutions at the Ennis assizes ; and, although I had already heard much of the factions, into which the peasantry are divided, I had no conception of the extent of this evil, nor of the bitterness with which this spirit of faction is attended. However these Actions may have originated, there is now no distinction among their adherents, excepting that which arises from the possession of a different name. The O'Sullivans are as distinct a people from the O'Neils, as the Dutch from the Belgians. The factions have chiefs, who possess authority. Regular agreements are made to have a battle ; the time agreed upon is generally when a fair takes place ; and, at these fights, there is regular marshalling, and " wheeling ;" and, as for its being a crime to break a " boy's" head, such an idea never enters the brain of any one.

The spirit of faction is brought into court by almost every witness in these prosecutions. I saw a witness, a woman, brought in support of the prosecution for a homicide committed on some cousin,—who on being desired to identify the prisoners, and the court-keeper's long rod being put into her hand, that she might point them out, struck each of them a smart blow on the head. As for finding out the truth, by the mere evidence of the witnesses, it is generally impossible. Almost all worth knowing, is elicited on the cross-examination : and it is always, by the appearance and manner of the witness, more than by his words, that the truth is to be gathered. All the witnesses, examined for the prosecution, were, by their own account, mere lookers on at the battle ; nor stick, nor stone had they. *Their* party had no mind to fight that day ; but, in making this assertion, they always take care to let it be known, that, if they had had a mind to fight, they could have handled their shillelahs to some purpose. On the other hand, all the witnesses for the prisoner aver just the same of themselves ; so that it is more by what witnesses wont tell, than by what they do tell, that truth is discovered. Half the witnesses called, on both sides, have broken heads ; and it is not unfrequently by a comparison of the injuries received on both sides, and by the evidence of the doctor, that one is helped to the truth.

It will be easily seen, from what I have said, that I found ample confirmation of what I had often heard,—the small regard for veracity among the Irish peasantry, and their general disregard of an oath. To save a relation from punishment, or to punish any one who has injured a relation, an Irish peasant will swear anything. This would be called, by some, hatred of the law ; but, although, in swearing falsely, the Irish peasant wishes to defeat the ends of justice, he does not do so, merely because he hates justice and the law, but because he thinks he is bound to save his relation, or any one of his action. If the name of the man who was killed be O'Grady, then every witness, who comes up to be sworn for the prosecution, is also an O'Grady ; or, if they be women, they were O'Gradys before they were married ; and, if the name of the prisoner be O'Neil, then all the witnesses, for the defence, are O'Neils ; or, if there be any exceptions in name, still there is a relationship of some kind.

The factions, which occasion the atrocities of which we, in England, know very little, (for the cases reported from the Irish assizes, in the English papers, are, generally, cases in some degree political, and are seldom, or ever, the homicides arising out of fights at fairs), have never been energetically met by the law and the magistracy. Some years ago, when trading magistrates were common, their non-interference was purchased by services performed. If a magistrate, living in the vicinity of a place where two great factions wished to try their strength, had a meadow ready for mowing—or a field of wheat ripe for the sickle—or wished to lay in his winter's turf—twenty or thirty men, of both factions, would volunteer their labour, and refuse, not only pecuniary recompense, but refreshment even : the fight was suffered to go on ; and the breakers of heads were leniently dealt

with. These days, I believe, are passed, or fast passing ; but there is still far too little energy shewn in putting down faction. It is true, that in many remote places—and it is often in the remotest spots that these encounters take place—there are no military, and few policemen ; but a resident magistrate, if he be a man fit for his office, may always be previously informed upon these matters. He knows that a faction exists in his neighbourhood ; he knows that the fair is drawing near ; he knows, that at every fair, a fight takes place ; and where any agreement has been made to fight out the quarrel at the fair, he may, without any difficulty, obtain the most accurate information ; and every one knows how easily a mob, especially an Irish mob, is reduced to obedience by a very trifling display of firmness and force. I look upon it as most essential to the prosperity of Ireland, that these factions should be put down. They are nearly as inimical to the investment of capital, and nearly as much encouragers of absenteeism, as many of those other kinds of agitation, which are more familiar to us : and I will again take the liberty of repeating my belief, that the substitution of a stipendiary, for an unpaid magistracy, is essential to the peace of Ireland. It is quite unreasonable to expect that an unpaid magistracy, situated as that magistracy is in Ireland, should do their duty. But, to return to the Ennis assizes.

The most numerous class of cases (with one exception), and the most important class, as throwing the greatest light on the character and state of the people, were those homicides of which I have spoken. The exception in point of number of cases, is rape : of these cases, I think nearly forty were entered for trial : but only a very few of that number were heard ; and all of them terminated in acquittal. In nine cases out of ten, the crime is sworn to, merely for the purpose of getting a husband ; and the plan generally succeeds. The parties are married before the cause is called for trial ; and I have myself seen an earnest negotiation carried on under the piazzas of the court-house, a little while before a case was called. There was the “ boy ” indicted for a capital crime, but out on bail, as he generally is ; and the girl, about to swear away a man’s life ; and the attorneys, and a large circle of relations, all trying to bring about a marriage, before Pat should be called upon to appear, and answer to the indictment that he, “ not having the fear of God before his eyes, and being instigated by the devil,” did so and so. In the case to which I was a listener, Pat and the fair one could not agree : the trial went on ; and Pat was acquitted.

The number, and nature of these cases, certainly indicate no very high state of morals ; for in every one of them, circumstances have occurred, which afford to the prosecutrix *some* ground of charge ; and the amicable termination of these cases, shews how small the ground of the *capital* charge is. In these cases too, the want of veracity is strongly displayed ; and it certainly impresses a stranger with no very favourable idea of female character, to find a girl falsely swearing a capital charge against a man whom she is willing at that moment to marry.

I saw tried, one of those singular cases of abduction, which very frequently occur in Ireland ; and which also throw considerable light on the state of society among the lower ranks. Sham cases of abduction are frequent. The “ boy ” and the girl are agreed ; but the girl’s relations being dissentient, owing to her being an heiress, and entitled to a better match, it is made up between the young people, that the girl shall be carried away by apparent force. The youth makes known the case to his friends, and collects a number of associates : they come during the night to the house of the girl, force open the door, seize upon the maid, who, though “ nothing loth,” screams and makes all the opposition in her power, place her on horseback, and, after escorting her a sufficient distance, deliver her over to the “ boy,” on whose account the abduction was got up. The charge of abduction which I saw tried at Ennis, was a real abduction however, and a very shameless one, attended with circumstances of great cruelty ; and originating, as indeed they always do, in love of money. These abductions are most detrimental to the peace of the country ; because a feud is instantly generated, between the relatives of the girl, and those of the aggressor ; and many subsequent fights invariably result from these outrages.

One of the cases tried at the Ennis assizes, was in many respects similar to that celebrated case, which was the foundation of that excellent novel, “ The Collegians.” A man was tried for the murder of a girl whom he had seduced ; he killed her, and buried her in a peat-rick ; and the similarity is the stronger, inasmuch as he was at the time, in treaty to marry another, not so high-born a damsel indeed, as Anne Chute ; but high enough and rich enough, to induce him to sacrifice *his* Elie O’Connor. In this case, one of the witnesses, on being desired to identify the prisoner, and being asked the question,

“ Is that the man ?” turned round and recognizing the prisoner, said, “ That’s him,” and added, “ How are you Paddy ?” nodding familiarly and good-humouredly to the accused. The man was convicted, and hanged.

Another case tried, arose out of one of those disputes, which, so frequently originate in the possession of, and competition for, land. It was a case wherein a widow paid an enormous rent for a bit of potato land ; and the rent not being paid, and the mischievous power of distraining being resorted to, the possessor endeavoured to save some portion of the potatoes. This gave rise to a fight ; and the fight occasioned man-slaughter. In this case, there was much false swearing, and much difficulty in arriving at the truth ; and the case strongly impressed upon me the conviction, that the power of distraining, in the hands of the lower orders, is a most mischievous power.

I noticed, that great importance is attached to kissing the book ; and sometimes, this ceremony is required, for greater security, to be performed two or three times. Without kissing the book, a witness looks upon his oath as very imperfectly taken ; and it is necessary that in the act of kissing, the witness be narrowly watched, lest he kiss his own thumb— with which he holds the book—in place of the book itself.

I noticed also, in the examination of one of the witnesses, a proof of the prevailing belief in the “ good people,” or fairies. A witness, being asked upon his oath, whether a certain individual could have made his way out of a room, the door and windows of which had been fastened, said, with the utmost gravity, it was impossible he could have got out, unless by enchantment ; meaning by this, without the assistance of the good people.

To attend an Irish assize, is certainly not the means by which a stranger is likely to obtain favourable impressions of Irish character. Few of its favourable traits are exhibited there ; while all the darker shades are made but too manifest. Want of veracity, on the most solemn occasion on which veracity is ever called for, is but too plainly established. We find the very reverse of that straightforwardness, which it is so delightful to see exhibited in the examination of a witness. If positive falsehood will serve the end, it is unhesitatingly resorted to ; and as for telling the *whole* truth, I saw no one instance of it.

But the most striking defect of character which is brought to light, is a perfect contempt of human suffering, and an utter disregard even of the value of human life. Weapons, of the most deadly description, are brought into court as evidence—sticks and whips loaded with lead ; and stones, that might crush the head of a horse. A ruffian may occasionally be found in England, who would slay a man alive to become possessed of his purse ; but I greatly question whether out of Ireland, fifty men could be found in any one parish, in any country in Europe, ready to beat one another’s brains out with sticks and stones, and all but glorying in the deed. And, as I have already observed, the same ferocity which has been exhibited at the fight, is brought into court : false oaths are the substitutes for weapons : and by these, witnesses seek to avenge the death of a relative who has been more unfortunate, but probably not more criminal, than the accused.

I was much struck at Ennis, as I had been at Tralee, with the acuteness and talent of the Irish attorneys. Their cross-examinations of witnesses were admirable ; certainly not surpassed by the very best cross-examinations I ever heard from the mouth of an English barrister.

A day or two before the conclusion of the Clare assizes, I left Ennis for Limerick ; returning by a road different from that by which I had gone to Ennis, and through an equally interesting and fertile country.

Return to Limerick—The New and Old Towns—Present State of the Trade of Limerick—Prosperity—Projected Improvements—Mr. Spring Rice—Public Institutions—The Lunatic Asylum—The Barrington Hospital—Antiquities—Condition of the Destitute Poor, and unemployed Artizans of Limerick—Minute Details—Poor laws—a Mont de Pieté—Loan Fund—Environs of Limerick—Lands and Rents—Embankments on the Shannon— The Village of Adair—Currah, and Dunraven.

I know of no town in which so distinct a line is drawn between its good and its bad quarters, as in Limerick. A person arriving in Limerick by one of the best approaches, and driving to an hotel in George Street, will probably say, "What a very handsome city this is !" while, on the other hand, a person entering the city by the old town, and taking up his quarters there—a thing, indeed, not likely to happen—would infallibly set down Limerick as the very vilest town he had ever entered.

The new town of Limerick is, unquestionably, superior to any thing out of Dublin. Its principal street, although less picturesque than the chief streets of Cork, would generally be reckoned a finer street. It is straight, regular, and modern-looking ; and contains abundance of good private houses and of excellent shops : and although there is less the appearance of business in Limerick than in Cork, and fewer evidences of affluence in its neighbourhood ; yet, in the more modern aspect of every thing there are more certain proofs of improvement than in the former city. The new town of Limerick is, indeed, of recent origin ; and the various indications of prosperity which Limerick presents, are all of them true indications.

The advance of the prosperity of Limerick, has been rapid and uniform. The amount of exports has nearly doubled since the year 1822. Nor has this increase been in only one branch of trade. With very few exceptions, it has attended every branch. The corn export trade, especially, has advanced. In 1822, the export of wheat was 102,593 barrels ; in 1828, the export had increased to 150,583 barrels ; in 1832, the quantity exported was 194,144 barrels ; and in 1833, 218,915. In barley, the export has never been great ; and although it has doubled since the year 1824, it has somewhat decreased during the last two years. In oats, the increase has been very great. From 155,000 barrels, exported in 1822, the quantity had risen, in 1832, to 408,000. In flour and oatmeal, too, the increase of export has been steady and great. Of the former article, 172 cwt. only was exported in 1824. In 1828, the quantity had risen to upwards of 6000 cwt ; in 1832, it was 33,000 cwt. ; and in 1833, upwards of 37,000. In oatmeal, the advance has been equally great. The butter trade, which I have found rather declining in most other places, exhibits no symptom of decline in Limerick. In 1822, 42,869 firkins were exported ; in 1831, 67,699 firkins were exported ; the following year, there was an advance upon this quantity ; and in 1833, 75,000 firkins were exported. In many other articles of trade, the increase has been equally great : but the general increase of trade, is best observed by the estimated value of the whole exports. In 1822, the estimated value was 479,538*l.* ; in 1830, the estimated value was 720,266*l.* ; the following year, it was 854,406*l.* ; in 1832, it was 1,005,945*l.* ; and in 1833, 936,995*l.* The tonnage of vessels clearing out of the port, exhibits the same advance. In 1822, the tonnage was 29,876 ; in 1825, 41,871 ; in 1831, 52,326 ; in 1833, 56,850.

From these data, I think I may venture to pronounce Limerick to be at this moment an advancing city ; and if certain improvements now in contemplation, be carried into effect, there is little reason to doubt, that the progress of Limerick will be even more rapid than it has hitherto been. The improvement to which I particularly allude is, the construction of a dock, by which the great drawback on the trade of Limerick—want of floating depth of water at low tide—will be obviated. The plan proposed, is a bold one : it is to throw a dam completely across the river, at some distance below the town ; so that vessels of 500 or 600 tons will be enabled to come up the river, and find a dock with from 20 to 24 feet of water.

This is not the only improvement that is in progress in Limerick. A handsome new bridge across the Shannon is nearly completed ; and a fine square is laid down, railed round, and planted, though not yet built upon. The centre of this square is adorned with a fluted pillar, surmounted by a statue of Mr. Spring Rice,—an honour well merited by that gentleman ;— for to his public spiritedness and exertions, the city of Limerick is mainly indebted for every improvement that has either been completed, or that is now in progress.

The public institutions of Limerick are on a fine scale, and some of them, under excellent management. Among the most interesting of these, the Lunatic Asylum may be mentioned. It is, indeed, a pattern for all such institutions. I have never anywhere seen a better example of what may be accomplished by proper management. The building, in its exterior, might be the residence of a nobleman ; its interior would put to shame the best scrubbed parlour of Rotterdam ; and, in viewing its in-

mates, madness appears divested of half its horrors. When I visited this institution, it contained 204 persons, only four of whom were that day under coercion.

The county gaol is also reputed to be one of the most approved prisons in the kingdom. I did not visit it ; but I believe it is conducted on the same system as the Cork county gaol.

There are several institutions in Limerick, for the alleviation of man's bodily sufferings ; and amongst these, I would particularly mention " Barrington's Hospital ;" not only because it is one of the best conducted ; but also, that I may have an opportunity of mentioning,—as it deserves to be mentioned,—the name of a family to whom the poor of Limerick are so deeply indebted. This hospital was built, and presented to the city, by the family of Sir Joseph Barrington ; and as some evidence of the extensive benefit conferred on the city by this institution, I may mention, that no fewer than 14,000 persons were relieved at the dispensary attached to the hospital, during the last six months. Important additions to this hospital are at present contemplated by Mr. M. Barrington, who seems resolved not to stint his beneficence, but is willing rather, that the capabilities of the institution shall keep pace with the wants of the city. Hospitals are frequently endowed with the wealth which the rich cannot carry into the grave with them ; but to found an hospital during a man's lifetime, is an act that deserves to be recorded, and remembered.

I visited, in Limerick, an extensive school for females, which is assisted by the new education board. I found about four hundred children, receiving a useful education,—able, in general, to write well ; perfectly instructed in reading ; and exhibiting, in their appearance and behaviour, the utmost order and neatness. This school is situated in the old town ; which contains other objects to interest a stranger. Thomond-bridge is among the most curious of the ancient monuments of Limerick. The irregularity and rude antiquity of its structure, are equally curious to the antiquarian, and striking to the love of the picturesque. The bridge is supposed to have been built about the year 1210 ; it is perfectly level, and is built upon fourteen arches.

Another interesting monument, is the cathedral, a large shapeless pile, with a handsome interior ; and with a tower, which every stranger ought to ascend ; for there is no elevation adjacent to Limerick, from which any satisfactory view of the city can be obtained ; and from this tower, not only the city, but a large portion of the counties of Limerick and Clare, is laid open ; and the tortuous course of the noble Shannon is made intelligible. Unless there be a considerable eminence contiguous to a town, the readiest way of becoming acquainted with its situation, form, and extent, is to climb the steps of the highest church tower. I never omit to do this.

To the antiquarian, there are many interesting vestiges in the old towns of Limerick. The Limerick reader will understand why I say towns ; to the English reader it requires to be told, that there is an English and an Irish town. Remnants of walls, and isolated bastions, are here and there discovered ; and the stone, on which the treaty of Limerick was signed, is pointed out to the stranger.

But there are objects of a far different nature, in the old towns of Limerick ;—objects of a deeper, and more melancholy interest. The reader will recollect, that in Cork, Waterford, Kilkenny, and in other towns which I have visited, I have made it a part of my duty to inquire into the condition of the poor ; and having been informed by those upon whom I thought some reliance was to be placed, that I should find more and deeper destitution in Limerick, than in any place which I had yet visited, my inquiries in Limerick were prosecuted with all the care which I was capable of bestowing ; and I regret to say, that I found too dreadful confirmation of the very worst reports ; I spent a day in visiting those parts of the city, where the greatest destitution and misery were said to exist. I entered upwards of forty of the abodes of poverty ; and to the latest hour of my existence, I can never forget the scenes of utter and hopeless wretchedness that presented themselves that day. I shall endeavour to convey to the reader some general idea of what I saw.

Some of the abodes I visited were garrets, some were cellars ; some were hovels on the ground-floor, situated in narrow yards, or alleys. I will not speak of the filth of the places ; *that* could not be exceeded in places meant to be its receptacles. Let the worst be imagined, and it will not be beyond

the truth. In at least three-fourths of the hovels which I entered, there was no furniture of any description, save an iron pot,—no table, no chair, no bench, no bedstead ;—two, three, or four little bundles of straw, with, perhaps, one or two scanty and ragged mats, were rolled up in the corners, unless where these beds were found occupied. The inmates, were some of them old, crooked, and diseased ; some younger, but emaciated, and surrounded by starving children ; some were sitting on the damp ground, some standing, and many were unable to rise from their little straw heaps. In scarcely one hovel, could I find even a potato. In one which I entered, I noticed a small opening, leading into an inner room. I lighted a bit of paper, at the embers of a turf which lay in the chimney, and looked in. It was a cellar wholly dark ; and about twelve feet square : two bundles of straw lay in two corners ; on one, sat a bed-ridden woman ; on another, lay two naked children,—literally naked, with a torn rag of some kind thrown over them both. But I saw worse even than this. In a cellar which I entered, and which was almost quite dark, and slippery with damp, I found a man sitting on a little sawdust. He was naked : he had not even a shirt : a filthy and ragged mat was round him : this man was a living skeleton ; the bones all but protruded through the skin: he was literally starving.

In place of forty hovels, I might have visited hundreds. In place of seeing, as I did, hundreds of men, women, and children, in the last state of destitution, I might have seen thousands. I entered the alleys, and visited the hovels, and climbed the stairs at a venture ; I did not select; and I have no reason to believe that the forty which I visited, were the abodes of greater wretchedness than the hundreds which I passed by.

I saw also, another kind of destitution. The individuals I have yet spoken of, were aged, infirm, or diseased : but there was another class, fast approaching infirmity and disease ; but yet able and willing to earn their subsistence. I found many hand-loom weavers, who worked from five in the morning till eight at night, and received from a task-master, from half a crown to four shillings a week. Many of these men had wives and families; and I need scarcely say, that confinement, labour, scanty subsistence, and despair, were fast reducing these men to the condition of the others, upon whom disease, and utter destitution had already laid their hands. The subsistence of these men consisted of one scanty meal of dry potatoes daily.

I will only add one other instance of destitution.

Driving in the neighbourhood of Limerick, on the Adair road, in company with a medical gentleman, the apparition of a man suddenly appeared by the side of our car. The gentleman who accompanied me knew him : he had been a stone-breaker ; but had become infirm, and at length utterly disabled, by disease, from labour : his cabin was close by ; and we ascertained, that he, and his family, had subsisted, during the last three days, on the leaves of that yellow-flowered weed which grows among the corn ; and which is boiled, and eaten with a little salt I think I have already mentioned the use of this weed for a similar purpose, by the destitute poor of Kilkenny; or if I have not, I ought to have done so,

I think it is impossible for me to select a better opportunity than this, to advert briefly to a topic, on which I have not hitherto offered any direct observations. I allude to the disputed question, whether there be, or be not, a necessity for some legal provision for the poor : and I confess, that with such scenes before me as I have at this moment, it does seem to me an insult to humanity and common sense, to doubt the necessity to which I allude. I might carry the reader back with me, to gather arguments from Kilkenny, Waterford, Cashel ; and, indeed, from almost every town, village, and hamlet, that has lain on my way ; but the situation of the poor of Limerick is at this moment fresh in my memory ; and I ask any man of ordinary intelligence, whether such a state of things can, or ought to be allowed to continue ? Why should Lord Limerick, in Ireland, be exempt from the duty which Lord Limerick, in England, must perform? Why, under the same government, should men be allowed to starve in one division of the empire, and not in another ? I mention the name of Lord Limerick, not because I suppose he, or any other man, can prevent pauperism on his city property ; but because, when I inquire who are the individuals that contribute to keep the bodies and souls of these miserable creatures together, and when I ascertain, that many a humane citizen contributes more than the noble owner of all the property, then I perceive, that there is something wrong ; and,—that leaving for a

moment the question, as it relates to the poor, out of consideration, justice demands, that in the ratio of their abundance, men should be forced to contribute.

At present, I shall not pursue the subject farther. But in a future chapter, when I shall have seen every part of Ireland, I shall speak at greater length, and with more confidence. This I mean to do, with reference to a Poor Law Commission, which was prosecuting its inquiries while I was in Ireland. By the kindness of friends, I was furnished with all the papers which government intended should guide the inquiries of the commissioners : and when I shall have travelled over every part of Ireland, I shall probably feel myself competent to furnish some answer to the queries which are contained in the instructions alluded to ; and possibly, to present my own report

A prospectus for establishing, in this city, a *Mont de Pieté* or charitable pawn-office, fell into my hands. The project originated with Mr. Barrington ; and, certainly, from the statements made in the prospectus to which I allude, any substitute for the common pawn-broking system ought to meet with encouragement. The rate of interest, 30 per cent, sanctioned by government, is increased to a ruinous degree, by the necessity of redeeming and repawning weekly, in place of monthly. One shilling lent, and received in the week, pays 1*d.* interest, and 1*d.* for the duplicate : this is 8*s.* 6*d.* interest on one shilling, for, a year.; or 8*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.* on a pound, for a year ; or 886*l.* 13*s.* 4 per cent, per annum ; and this, exclusive of compound interest. The prospectus, after setting forth the wrongs suffered by the necessitous, under the present system, proposes that the profits of the establishment, after paying expenses, shall be applied, in the first instance, in payment of the interest of the capital lent, at 5 per cent, and that the surplus profits shall be divided into equal shares : one, in paying off the debentures ; and the other (and when the debentures are paid, the whole) in maintaining and extending the benefits of the hospital I have dwelt the longer upon this matter, from the belief which I entertain, that the miserable condition of the poor of Ireland is made greatly more miserable, by the extortionate system of common pawn-broking ; and that an important relief would be afforded to the poor, by the establishment, wherever practicable, of a *Mont de Pieté*, to which the needy man may go with confidence—secure against usurious exaction—knowing that he will receive the fair value on the article deposited ; that no advantage will be taken of his ignorance or necessity ; and that he is, at the same time, obtaining relief for the present, and contributing to a fund which will comfort and relieve him in the hour of distress. I sincerely trust Mr. Barrington may be successful in his attempt, and that the benefits to the poor of Limerick, which would infallibly follow, may lead to similar institutions elsewhere.

There is in Limerick, as in Cork, and several other places, a loan fund, the residue of subscriptions for the distressed Irish, which was apportioned by the London Committee, in 1822, to different counties, for the promotion of industry. I have a statement, now before me, of the present condition of this fund ; and it will surprise the reader to be told, that, while the sum put at the disposal of the county of Limerick has increased, by judicious management, since the year 1822, from 6370*l.* to 7521*l.*, and, in other counties, in greater or less proportion,—in some counties it has remained stationary, or suffered a decrease. In Clare, the 6000*l.* intended to be applied to the benefit of the industrious, by loan, at a small interest, and on proper security, has become 5989*l.* In Sligo, the 3870*l.* has become 3831*l.* In Leitrim there has been on the original 2000*l.*, a decrease of no less than 867*l.* ; and perhaps the most singular fact of all is, that the 2500*l.* allocated to Tipperary is, at this moment, precisely 2500*l.* There must have been somewhere gross mismanagement, or grosser jobbing. Where has the 2500*l.* been since 1822 ? It can never have been applied as intended, because a single loan made, must have either added to, or taken from it ; it cannot have lain in a bank, because interest would have accrued upon it ! From all that I could ascertain, both in Cork and in Limerick, I have reason to think that this loan fund has been most beneficial in its effects ; and that any loan fund, under judicious management, must produce important results, in encouraging industry, and accumulating capital.

I have said nothing, as yet, of the environs of Limerick. In the neighbourhood of such a river as the Shannon, they can scarcely be otherwise than beautiful ; and the great natural fertility of the soil, and the improved husbandry, pretty generally adopted, greatly increase the attractions of this fine district. The Marquis of Lansdowne possesses an extensive estate close to Limerick. It is in the finest state of

cultivation ; and, from a personal survey, I may state that every industrious tenant is in comfortable circumstances ; and that the moderate rent charged for the excellent land in this neighbourhood, was in striking contrast with the rents paid for the comparatively indifferent land which I had lately seen in the neighbourhood of Ennis.

I cannot speak so well of the property of the Earl of Limerick. Whatever advantages the tenantry possess, are referable to the exertions and good-heartedness of his lordship's agents. I will not trust myself to speak further of the Earl of Limerick, unless only to add, that from high and low, rich and poor, I never heard a good word of his lordship.

Some extensive embankments are now in course of being constructed below Limerick, with the view of reclaiming land. One of these, the lowest down the river, is undertaken by a Scotch gentleman, who has already sunk a large sum in the attempt : the others are undertaken by Lord Lansdowne and by Mr. Harrington; and there is no doubt of the ultimate success of all these attempts. Before leaving Limerick, I visited the beautiful village of Adair, and the fine domains of the Earl of Dunraven, and of Sir Aubrey de Vere.

This was one of the most agreeable days I have spent I took a circuitous road, skirting the left bank of the Shannon, and visiting a village, called Palace, on my way, that I might have the pleasure of looking in upon the talented author of " The Collegians." Carragh, the domain of Sir Aubrey de Vere, I greatly admire. Sir Aubrey being then engaged as foreman of the grand jury at Limerick, I had not an opportunity of presenting my letter of introduction. It is only when I do not, or have not an opportunity of presenting my letters of introduction, that I mention them at all ; and this, not as information to the public, to whom the matter is of no importance ; but for the information of the individuals who gave me the letters, and of the individuals to whom they were addressed, who may possibly be aware of my having been in possession of such letters ; and who, without some mention of them, would be ignorant of the reason why they were not used.

Adair, and the domain of the Earl of Dunraven (to whom I also carried a letter, which I did not deliver), are both beautiful. Within Lord Dunraven's domain are no fewer than three ruins of abbeys,—one of them, the Black Abbey, yet in tolerable preservation. There is also, close to the picturesque bridge over the Maize, the ruins of the castle of the Earls of Desmond. The Earl of Dunraven is now building a new castellated mansion, close to the old house : with Kingston Castle in my recollection, it appeared rather diminutive ; but the surrounding scenery is close scenery, and not suitable to a very commanding edifice.

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