

Her Realm of Achill

Connemara and the neighboring spots of beauty and interest.

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1906

Achill Island—Dooagh—Captain Boycott—Kim Bay—Borondon—The “Sea Otter”—
Brown Trout—Cormorants—Keel—Inishgalloon—Cathedral Rocks.

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We anchored again in about twelve fathoms of water, and got out our conger lines. The moon was now sailing over towards Achill Head, making a glorious angels' path on the surface of the oily water as it rose and fell in long undulations.

The water lapping the canoe's bows gently rippled away in a streaky blaze of phosphorescent silver, the peculiar quietness immediately around and the clearness with which you could hear the surge roaring away on the rocks a great distance off being singularly reminiscent of the Norway fiords.

We had three lines out with a one-pound sinker on each, from which, at a foot's distance, was a long-shanked (four and a-half inch), elegant, bronzed steel hook, the width across the barbed end (outside measurement) being one and a-quarter inch. The hook was attached to snooding, around which we had twined metal gimp, and then to a swivel, on the other end of which the line commenced with a loop large enough for the hand to be inserted.

We found in practice that these hooks were so long in the shank that we could have dispensed altogether with the gimp, no conger that we caught biting on the snooding.

We baited two with the guts of the scads we had just caught, threaded up on the shanks of the hooks with the heads of the same nearer the barbs, and the other line was baited with the bodies of crabs smashed up soft with the policeman-staff-like disgorger.

It takes a little time for conger to smell the bait and gather round at the bottom of the sea, and Florrie, who sat on the stroke-seat facing me at the stern, and with John beside her, broke the silence with, “The fish are very slow to-night,” a remark which John took as some mild sort of reflection upon himself or his birthplace, for he rejoined, “Well, in these parts we say the three fastest fish in the sea are mackerel, seal, and” when——“Look out!” I cried, for I felt a tremendous strain on my hand, and I began hauling for all I was worth. My surmise that I had a big fish on was more correct than John's natural history, and the interruption may have saved him from making another innocent mistake. We never heard what the third “fish” was, for he too began hauling in with might and main.

Hauling hand over hand, and occasionally resting by tightening the line on the edge of the boat when the fish gave an extra strong plunge, digging my nails into the line to prevent it slipping through my fingers, I called to Florrie to “stand by” with the disgorger, for I knew it would be wanted.

John was breathing hard, and in the dim light I could, out of the corner of my eye, see him with his knees pressed against the gunwale, pulling back into the boat with his body well down. The severe strain on the port side almost brought the gunwale under water.

Nearly worn out I craned my head over a moment to see if the end was near. Some two or three fathoms down in the dark water were two huge phosphorescent balls like immense electric arc-lamps, eloquently giving a forecast of what was to come.

John stood up first, leaned over, and, with a gasp and both hands, heaved a terribly vivid, bright, writhing mass over the gunwale. It was a monster conger. Its huge body flapped right and left, and it dashed over the other side of the canoe. By a backward pull he got the beast down again in the boat, and getting his left hand into the loop above the swivel, he held the creature's head well up while he rained blows upon it with the butt-end of the twenty-one-inch disgorger in his right.

I had meanwhile managed to get over the side into the boat another huge conger, and telling Florrie to sit still and not stand up, I began belabouring it as its long, strong body alternately lashed round her and my legs. The disgorger, a massive, heavy weapon of hard wood, was now all over blood and difficult to hold. My arm ached, and the blows and screams of the two fish for large conger can make a queer unearthly noise could have been heard for a considerable distance over the oily phosphorescent surface of the sea.

The scene must have been indescribably weird could we have had time to have observed it, but the intense excitement prevented anything of a reflective nature ; Florrie, with commendable pluck, sitting quite cool with her petticoats gathered tightly round her legs ; the two huge monsters, ghastly luminous, twirling round on the hooks as their heads were held up, and their bodies lashing with fury on either side of her ; the noise of the hard blows and the gathering darkness over the sea, for by now the moon had disappeared.

Shifting the hold of the conger to the right hand, with my left I loosed my Norwegian knife from my hip-pocket, and, holding the head of the brute against the edge of the seat, I inserted the point just behind the head on the neck and pushed it well home into the spine, after which the gyrations of the animal became perceptibly less vigorous.

Passing my knife "forrard" to John, he acted as I had done, and we all felt happier and more comfortable in the boat. Still, the two serpent-like fish went on wriggling, but the snap of their jaws was no longer dangerous as they writhed on the floor of the boat, and we only had occasionally to club them as they rose snake-like towards the gunwale. Using now the V-cleft, thin end of the useful disgorger, we soon had the hooks out, and, re-baiting them, flung the tackle overboard.

That night, in the turf-smoked kitchen, we measured those two congers. Having no tape measure, Letty, who knew her height to a fraction, volunteered to have the bigger one held up against her "back to back." The monster, that which John had caught, just topped her hair with its tail touching the stone floor, and Letty's height is exactly five feet six inches. The other conger was about a foot shorter. But besides those two monsters, caught almost simultaneously, before we left the bank, with the same tackle and bait, we caught one ling of over 20 lbs. weight, three more congers, and one dog-fish.

Our arms ached for days after from the clubbing, and our fingers were tired from the strain of hauling the wet lines. The largest conger we split open, removed the backbone, slightly salted and dried the body in the sun on the roof of a neighbouring turf-covered hovel, and its carcass, in pieces, soaked and boiled, afforded in London a change to enliven the monotony of our local fishmonger's supply.

Corrymore House, now the property of Mr. Scott, who owns the part of that island, or at any rate has it on a long lease, was once inhabited by the famous Captain Boycott, whose name afterwards gave a new expression to the English language. A lake of considerable extent lies back from the house, higher up in a depression in the mountain's side, and is well stocked with brown or speckled trout of a good size. Captain Boycott built, too, a house in a lovely situation on a little plateau in the valley at the back of Kim Bay, which was accidentally burnt down, and has not been rebuilt. Many stories are locally current about him. He was a "great" man with horses, and drove tandem along the road from Dooagh, having been known to do so at midnight—a dare-devil performance when one looks down at the terrible declivity on the side nearer the sea. A natural stone seat on the roadside, commanding magnificent views of Kim and the shore, is still associated with him as a spot where he often sat to admire the view.

He left Achill, and it was at another place on the mainland that the intimidations took place which made his name proverbial.

Kim road was cut out of the precipitous mountainside in 1831, before which date Kim could only be approached on foot or horseback, and many a pack of tobacco has been carried on men's shoulders over the mountains from the quiet bay which never interviewed excise officers. The tobacco used to be made up in bundles of one, two, or more stone weight, ready strung on shipboard with shoulder-straps to enable the packs to be carried on men's backs without delay on the ship's arrival.

Directly after leaving Dooagh the road begins to ascend, and it goes up, up, then stays on a winding level for a short distance, passes the scratched-out ground whence the boys extract amethysts, and then descends rapidly till it winds over the pointed arched bridge, beneath which a small cascade falls, and so to the beach at Kim Bay.

A more miniaturely perfect bay it were difficult to even imagine or dream of, possessing as it does a fairy-like completeness, and it is only extraordinary that so beautiful a spot is without inhabitants. In the future we can see its green grass slopes spotted with villa residences and with an elaborate hotel in the centre of the valley.

A few ruined cabins and the occasional presence of boys and girls looking after the cattle put out to graze on the neighbouring hills are now the only evidence of human life. Except for the rare visit of Galway trawlermen in the bay (much hated by the natives) and fishermen from Dooagh when mackerel or herring "show," the spot is deserted. From an artistic point of view long may this state of things continue.

The strand of fine hard sand is a quarter of a mile across, flanked on either side with rocks of the most exquisite deep purple in patches, where young mussels in myriads present their sharply-joined edges to the unwary hand, and where crabs sprawl about sideways when the tide is low; and behind these banks of rock, or rather chaotically-thrown angular boulders, on either side running out to the south-east, precipitous green-clad cliffs throw out two protecting arms seaward. The sweet, green little valley, running backwards and upwards on the north, would culminate, if you went far enough, in Croaghaun, 2192 feet above the surrounding Atlantic. Beyond that, again, the sheer, stupendous precipices of Saddle Head, the home of wild goats, are lapped by the waves of that ocean between which and America there is nothing but sea.

When we say nothing but sea, that is our personal belief, but not the belief of many of the natives. There is still extant in the hearts of the peasants a leaning to the possibility of the mystic island existing in the Atlantic. Found at times, to be again lost, San Borondon is very

real to the imaginative Irish Celt. Some think it is only visible once a year. The idea is a beautiful one, and not alone peculiar to the West of Ireland. The Spaniards had a firm belief in such an island, and it may be that the legend, which is firmly crystallized in Ireland, owes somewhat of its solidity to the Spanish connection with Ireland in past centuries. As shewing how strong an article of faith it was with the Spaniards, I may mention that in 1519, when the Canary Islands were ceded to Spain by Portugal in the Treaty of Ivora, San Borondon is actually mentioned by name as one of the group by the name *Ilha nao Truvata*—Unfound Island ! The faith of the Canarios in its reality took shape in 1526, when an expedition actually left in search of it. They took a holy Franciscan friar to exorcise the evil spirit which rendered this mysterious island invisible, but the island, like spirits from the vasty deep, did not appear when summoned. Yet another expedition in search of San. Borondon left as late as 1721, under official direction, from Tenerife with, this time, two chaplains on board, but, alas ! it was no use. After these examples of practical faith and belief, who shall say that the Irish are more given to superstition than other nations ?

Achill, or the “ Eagle” Island, is the largest adjacent to the coast of Ireland, and the bird from which it is named is still to be seen round Croaghaun or Slievemore, but it is rare.

On the east side of Kim Bay, when the tide is out, an angular-entranced cave may be entered, a pool of fresh water at the back explaining the luxuriant existence of a leafy clothing of ferns of many species.

This is the habitat of an interesting mammal—the “ sea otter,” so called of the natives. The animal comes, to drink fresh water in the fern-festooned caves near the sea, and we have seen its innumerable footprints on the muddy floor of this particularly lovely grotto situated amongst the enormous boulders on the storm-swept shore. An occasional member of the species is trapped here—about four have been taken during the past three years—and these specimens curiously differ from the English species. The Irish otter has even been considered a distinct species from the English on account of the intensity of its colouring, which approaches nearly to black, both on the upper and under surfaces, of the less extent of the pale colour beneath the throat, and because it is essentially a marine animal. But, Irish or English, its devastating nature is well and truthfully summed up in old Izaak Walton’s sentence : “ The otter devours much fish, and kills and spoils much more than he eats.” It were probably more scientifically correct to consider the Irish as merely a marked and marine variety of the English fresh-water animal.

The fur, when dressed, is as soft as the best sealskin, and makes an exquisite wrap for a lady’s adornment. The animal is so rarely captured that the pelts are worth quite a fancy price in the market.

The rocky nature—dangerously rocky nature of the shore round Achill only allows the use of seine nets at a few spots, one being the beautiful stretch of firm sand at Kim Bay. When shoals of fish play here they come into the narrow confines in large numbers, and then the usually deserted cove is alive with say a dozen men and boys—that is a crowd in Achill. Nets, sixty yards in length, are joined together, placed in the stern of, and rowed out in, a canoe, and then allowed to drop by being paid out into the water round the clump. A rope attached to each end at the shore is hauled in, and at last the composite net itself. The arrival of the last pocket on the sand is a moment of intense excitement. Everyone loses his head and rushes into the edge of the breakers to see what the catch is. Soon a mass of glittering, noisily-flapping life proclaims a catch of mackerel or herring. But mixed with the bulk are always, at Kim, other fish. The writer has helped many a day to “ draw the nets” at Kim, and noted on one occasion the presence, besides mackerel in thousands, of six red mullet, one grey mullet, forty flat-fish, and one gurnet. On another occasion the “ oddments” proved to

be one nine-pound salmon, eighteen large gurnet, two plaice, three large soles, fourteen pollack, one devil-fish, one skate, one conger, eight red mullet, three Sweet Williams, two codling, one turbot—a mixed and very typical Kim bag. The end of the draw of a seine net is one of the rare pleasures of life never to be forgotten.

The drift nets they use for taking mackerel and herring, when they cannot be “drawn” owing to the rocky shore, are suspended in the water by floats of a novel character. They are made out of the skins of sheep gathered into a bladder the size of a football, and tied round a six-inch long, bung-shaped piece of wood. In this plug of wood two holes are made : one at the end to fasten the rope to the float, and so to buoy up the net ; the other at the side leading into the interior, through which air is blown to inflate the contrivance. The bladders thus formed are a foot or two in diameter, and, being well tarred or greased, are waterproof. Some, extra large, are balloon-shaped and made in sections of canvas like an overgrown football, and these are tarred inside as well as outside.

There are several little streams—you can jump across them all at places—in Achill, and they abound with brown trout up to six and even ten inches in length. The stream, which enters the sea at the far side of Dooagh, is a delightful bubbling abiding place for trout innumerable. A fly can be thrown at spots, but dapping with a daddy-long-legs or an ordinary earthworm on a small hook are the best methods for effecting their capture. Fine tackle and thin gut two or three feet before the hook must be used, and a good deal of skill is required. While one fisher can catch several dozen in an evening, another with an exact duplicate of the apparatus will catch none. Fishing in streams is like pastry-making—some can make pastry, some cannot.

The Dooagh stream flows from the lake at the back up the mountain behind Corrymore House (where formerly Captain Boycott lived). It makes one or two steep descents with much-broken water, where I have caught some of the largest trout, and then meanders in a very serpentine, sharp-curved course along a considerable extent of flat boggy land before again rushing with here and there one or two lovely deep pools—down a declivity, and so to the pebbly beach of the sea, beneath a picturesque wooden bridge. I know no more lovely walk in Achill than while fishing that stream up and down on a fine summer day. If it rains the fish bite far better, which is a consolation. Corymore Lake also contains the same species of trout, the largest I have taken there being ten inches. These trout were the best, sweetest trout I have ever eaten anywhere, even in Norway and Canada. They are white in flesh, and have no boggy or objectionable flavour at all.

Pollack and mackerel can be caught in abundance with a rod and large white flies with black bodies, or with quickly-revolving spinners on a loaded line from the canoe, and many a large pollack of nine or twelve pounds we have also enticed to leave the sea here on large red rubber imitation sand-eels six inches in length.

With hooks an inch and a half long and a quarter of an inch across at the barbed end, baited with the interior economy of crabs, retained in position with strands of worsted wound round the unsavoury-looking morsel, rock-fish of several pounds weight, locally known as “gunners,” can be caught here in abundance from the rocks. The lead or stone sinker is fixed about fourteen inches from the hooks, and on one of these—a small hook—while there fishing we once caught a heavy conger, four feet six inches in length, that fought well and pluckily for life.

It is not difficult to tell when mackerel are about. The gulls which have been resting on the rocks near get uneasy. One leaves the ledge and goes off with a cry and a “gully, gully.” Others follow suit till not one is left. They make a tremendous clamour, and hustle one an-

other over the spot where the mackerel are. Their shrill cries and the beating of their scimitar wings draw other colonies farther away from the scene, and you can see birds coming in frantic haste in clouds from the dim distance. Most people when they discover a gold-mine keep it to themselves. Birds are more charitable, and : at once spread abroad the good news. Cormorants—“ soldiers” as we usually call them on account of the straight lines they form up in on the rocks—with stiff, outstretched, long necks, flap up as fast as they can and join in the medley and scrimmage. So busy are they all in a solid phalanx that they allow the canoes to go within a yard or two of them. So noisy is the uproar that you can hardly hear yourself speak. Gulls are the gossips and chatterboxes of the ocean. Then suddenly the chirrup of pulsating bird-life rises from the surface of the sea, leaving a frothy patch on the water and a scattering of grey, white, and dark-brown feathers, and off it goes to another spot close at hand, to which the birds know the fish have gone.

The cormorant (*Phalacrocorax Carbo*) is a remarkably silent bird, but occasionally indulges in a hoarse, harsh, hollow croak. It has a penetrating eye, and views you suspiciously as it sits bold upright on the rocky ledge as the canoe approaches. It is an inveterate glutton, and will gorge itself with fish till quite full up, and is only lazy when its appetite is completely satiated. In fact its greediness has become proverbial, and a voracious eater, a good “ trencher-man” as they say in Ireland, is often compared to this bird.

The bird seems never to have had a fair chance to get up a reputation. I have no doubt it is no worse than other birds, and has been terribly maligned. Milton even compares Satan to a cormorant, a fateful and ominous comparison for any bird :—

“ Thence up he flew ; and on the tree of life,
The middle tree, and highest there that grew,
Sat like a cormorant.”

Milton, however, displays a wonderful knowledge of natural history, for he knew what few probably now know, that cormorants breed inland as well as on the seaside rocks. At Gort, in the south of County Galway, some cormorants build in trees on an island in Lough Cooter.

This spot is ten miles in a direct line from the nearest sea, but here they build and rear their young in close proximity to a large colony of rooks. Curiously enough, on another island on the same Lough is a heronry. The owner very thoughtfully prohibits anyone molesting these interesting birds.

Gulls do not seem to eat the mackerel—I have watched them closely for hours at sea while fishing and never seen a mackerel in their mouths—but the small fish, an inch or an inch and a half in length, like whitebait, which the mackerel throw up out of their mouths. The excitement of the birds at the surface of the water probably causes this regurgitation through nervousness. . It is most usual for a mackerel to disgorge one or two of these small fry, when landed in the canoe, as you take the hook out of its mouth ; in fact we found these strangely-obtained little fish very handy and effective for bottom fishing for whiting. Probably, too, the mackerel drive up from the lower depths of the sea myriads of these small fish, and this fact the gulls and sea-birds know.

Is it sight or smell which enables these watchers and scavengers of the sea so marvellously able to detect the presence of fish ? My observations would point to both faculties being developed to a degree we humans cannot understand. Or have they some other sense we possess not ? Not unlikely.

Our knowledge of things outside our little ken of sense is small—probably very small indeed did we but know it. Our senses are probably infinitesimal compared with the aggregate of senses of beings even on this world of ours. “ We judge too much of other beings by our own physical imperfection. We can’t run as fast as a horse ; we can’t jump as high as a flea in proportion to our size ; we certainly can’t fly ; we have no power of scent comparable to that possessed by a dog ; we have no sight like the vulture. As Huxley said, with great truth, there may be “ kinds of existence which we are not competent so much as to conceive,” and so it may be that the certainly wonderful knowledge possessed by gulls and cormorants as to the whereabouts of fish, and these birds’ power of conveying the knowledge to others at vast distances, may be to them the ordinary usage of faculties we have no knowledge of.

Of one thing I am as nearly certain as it is possible to be. Fish, I am convinced, experience nothing at all of what we designate “ pain.” I have repeatedly caught fish just after they have been severely hooked and lost. I lost a large “ gunner” (6 lbs.) with a big hook and six inches of snooding attached, and ten minutes afterwards landed the same fish on another hook. I could give similar instances regarding nearly every fish that takes the hook, and every fisherman (salt or fresh) will endorse my statement. The *Fishing Gazette* is a perfect *repertoire* of facts pointing to the same conclusion. Trout I have caught with *several* hooks in one fish ! If these hooks in their mouths cause pain, surely they would rush away from the scene of the disaster—but they do not !

Keel, on the south side of the island, has probably a future before it, if ever the railway is continued there from Achill Sound. With a southern aspect, in a deeply-indented bay, and with a fine, firm strand of sand—a hundred or more yards in width when the tide is out—immediately backed by a lofty pebble ridge, the two-and-a-half mile stretch of Keel Bay would make an ideal watering-place. No spot probably in the British Isles presents such an opportunity for the wise, far-seeing speculator. The name of Keel is derived from the Irish word, and alludes to the strip of land between lake and sea, the strand at Keel being separated from Keel Lake by a wide stretch of flat grassy and sandy land.

On the east of the bay the verdant Isle of Inishgalloon, with its rounded contour, pierced through with a remarkable daylight cave at present inhabited solely by a few sheep, the happy home of innumerable gulls, red-beaked and footed oyster-catchers, and curlew, is an unfailing agreeable picture. The west of Keel Bay is bounded by the wonderful Minawn Cliffs, “ Cathedral Rocks,” as they are called, 1530 feet in height, of Gothic arches and delightful pools, where small marine life luxuriates, these alone constituting an attraction worth a long journey to see. And then the large lake close to the shore in the background, where sea-trout are found in fair abundance and size, and surrounding sandy littoral, with natural bunkers placed just in the right spots to make this the future site of ideal golf-links. And the distant views in front looking seaward, or back looking inland ! All magnificent, under every variety of atmospheric colouring. Mighty Croaghaun, rearing his head in sublime majesty when the dry wind has cleared the mists away, which usually lovingly linger round, bringing his presence surprisingly near ; or when enveloped in fleecy-white masses, or when thunderously black-looking, always a picture beautiful to behold.

Conical-shaped Slievemore (2204 feet), a nearer neighbour in the background, close enough in fine weather to enable the heather to be discerned in masses of many varieties of rich purple hue, interspersed with vivid green patches, and shewing the square little bits of tillage around its base, is about as restful a view as can anywhere be seen. The smooth beach of fine firm sand, of vast extent, of most deceptive distances, would make a paradise for children, a magnificent race-course, or fashionable promenade—and there is room for all these together. In the front of the bay, dreamy veil upon veil of distant mountains down Connemara way, with the intervening islands, make the seaward prospect delightful.

The stream from the lake meanders in changeful, serpentine tracks at its leisure through the sand, and a cascade of good drinking water from the cliffs at the west end of the bay make that spot a perfect place for a picnic ; and driftwood of all kinds, waifs and strays from the sea caught in the pebble ridge is in almost inexhaustible quantity.

The Doega district of Achill is very reminiscent of Norway. It is much fretted by the sea, and has narrow gorges at places, in one picturesque spot the old road following the contour of the ground is seen now deserted save by pack-animals and the new road spanning the declivity by a bridge is the usual modern route.

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Coronation Time at Dooagh, Achill Island.

I KNOW there is a widespread feeling in England that the Irish are at heart most disloyal to the Crown. That they are “ agin the Grovernmint” is, of course, proverbial, and one thing ; but that they are disloyal to the Crown, as distinguished from the local powers that be, is another. Certain Irishmen deliberately foster and encourage disloyalty. In many cases they even come to imagine that the sentiment really exists for their own personal and party purposes. But the real Irish Celt—the poor peasant—is, in my humble opinion, at heart loyal to the persons of the present King and Queen. When Queen Victoria was reigning the case was different. She visited Scotland so frequently and Ireland never, that no wonder, as a great personality, she was nothing to the Irish ; they never grasped her goodness and individuality. It was not their fault. The Irish are, and always have been, hero-worshippers—they must worship, it is in their nature. The visits of the King to Ireland have done more to put down sedition than all the gas of the House of Commons, whether emanating from the windbags on one side of the House or the other. The people have *seen* the King, or seen their friends who have seen him, and—a very, very great and—they like him and Queen Alexandra. Yes, the peasants, at any rate, of Connemara and the West of whom I am writing are loyal. Let me illustrate this. I happened to be staying at Dooagh, the poorest village in Achill Island, as I have pointed out, which is only another way of saying the poorest and most squalid village in all Ireland, during the Coronation time. I will relate as simply as I can what actually took place on that, the most westerly village in the British Isles, on that memorable night—a night, I venture to say, which will be handed down traditionally as a great event for many, many generations.

Knowing that we should be there during the Coronation time we took with us some simple night-light illuminations of the usual old-fashioned coloured-glass cup description, and the initials “ E. R.” worked out in wire in the same, and these, with a crown and Prince of Wales’ feather and Japanese lanterns, we affixed to the front and windows of the little house—the only house, bar the public-house, with a slate roof in Dooagh. When evening came I suppose the whole village—men, women, and children (in arms and out)—gathered together in the court-yard, cut out of solid bog around the house, and on the adjacent road. I had sent round a general invitation. The inhabitants responded—a quiet, shy, orderly, well-mannered crowd, soft spoken, and with bare feet. The children ranged themselves in the front, the elders behind them.

It was a strange, weird scene, the most westerly spot in the British Isles where the King’s Coronation was celebrated, for Dooagh is the most westerly village in Achill. The inhabitants had never before in their lives seen anything in the shape of illuminations.

We distributed pea-soup in teacups—our commissariat did not run to luxuries—weak whisky-and-water amongst the men, sweets amongst the children. The King’s touching letter to the nation was read to the crowd by the light from the lanterns, and listened to with the

most breathless, almost painfully breathless, attention. When the illness and happy recovery of the King had been explained to them a sigh of relief one could not help hearing arose all around, right out to the edges of the crowd and into the shadows and darkness of the road beyond. And in “ God save the King” that crowd of bare-headed, bare-footed, ragged, beautifully-eyed men, women, and children joined with quiet, deep feeling and genuine fervour. In three cheers for the King, followed by the same for the Queen, they also joined. A more personally-attached people to the King and Queen all of our party felt did not exist in the British Isles. And at the end, about midnight, when told that the exciting festivities were over—for we had had dances and songs—that crowd dispersed, as if by magic, in a quiet, orderly way, not one single person hanging about the house, and we could not help spontaneously saying to one another that a more truly delightful, innocent, and novel entertainment we had never had.

A casual tourist—many of whose congeners go to Achill—rushing through the island and never troubling to know or study the inhabitants, said to me one day afterwards, on seeing the decorations still standing, “ Do you mean to say the people allowed those to remain up ?” The insinuation contained in the remark is unfortunately typical. Those decorations remained up till we left, and not one was once broken, touched, or even interfered with in any way whatsoever.

The King’s own impression of what the people thought of him after his visit to Ireland was expressed in his letter, dated August 1st, 1908, addressed “ To my Irish People.” He says :—

“ I desire, on leaving Ireland, to express to my Irish people how deeply I have been touched by the kindness and goodwill which they have shewn to the Queen and myself.

“ Our experience on previous visits had, indeed, prepared us for the traditional welcome of a warm-hearted race. But our expectations have been exceeded. Wherever we have gone, in town or country, tokens of loyalty and affection, proffered by every section of the community, have made an enduring impression on our hearts.

“ For a country so attractive and a people so gifted, we cherish the warmest regard, and it is, therefore, with supreme satisfaction that I have, during our stay, so often heard the hope expressed that a brighter day is dawning upon Ireland.

“ I shall eagerly await the fulfilment of this hope. Its realization will, under Divine Providence, depend largely upon the steady development of self-reliance and co-operation ; upon better and more practical education ; upon the growth, of industrial and commercial enterprise ; and upon that increase of mutual toleration and respect which the responsibility my Irish people now enjoy in the public administration of their local affairs is well fitted to teach.

“ It is my earnest prayer that those and other means of national well-being may multiply from year to year in Ireland, and that the blessings of peace, contentment, and prosperity may be abundantly vouchsafed to her.”

During the evening we had our room full of the natives, and I shewed them some conjuring tricks—that most ancient of all tricks, the vanishing man in the cloak, the Chinese rings, the cone through the hat, unlimited eggs from a handkerchief, and so on. They had never in their lives before seen anything at all approaching a conjuring trick. The silence was intense ; they were too interested to speak ; they scarcely drew their breath ; their eyes—those wonderful Irish eyes—were glued upon me in eloquent amazement. Never had a conjuror such an awfully appreciative audience. The only remark I heard was one man saying to

another that if he could do those things “ sorra a day’s work” would he be doing again, but would go round the fairs and patterns and make his fortune. I noticed I was looked at rather askance by the children and many of the peasants after that conjuring show for several days. Often by the roadside I would be stopped and asked quite abruptly a question concerning some stage in the performance of a trick, shewing how the ingenious Irish mind had never ceased trying to puzzle the problem out.

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Grace O’Malley, The Woman Pirate of Achill.

THE female pirate of Achill Island, Grace O’Malley, lived and pirated in the time of Queen Elizabeth, and no more romantic personage illuminated a reign singularly remarkable for the extraordinary number of its great men and women. Then for the first time in the nation’s history arose that love of enterprise and adventure which, developing ever since, has made this Empire the mightiest the world has ever seen—an Empire to-day of 400 million souls.

The spirit of the time, with its feverish unrest and taste for adventure, found expression on the extreme west of Ireland in the exploits of an intrepid wild Irish girl.

Her father, Owen O’Malley, a mighty chief in County Mayo, died, leaving his daughter in the dangerous position of a local queen, adored by her people as much for her beauty, spirit, and pluck as for her being her father’s heiress and successor.

Proud and imperious she certainly was, and she ruled her realm of Achill Island and Clare, with the neighbouring mainland thrown in, as absolutely as Elizabeth did over her far larger dominions. The two women had much in common. Both were impulsive and despotic, impatient under restraint of any kind, excessively generous when it suited the whim of the moment, cruel and relentless when balked or when championing a cause—no matter whether a just or an unjust one.

The characters of each were, no doubt, considerably moulded by the isolated positions they occupied, and by the remarkable times in which they lived. Each occupied a pedestal in her sphere of activity, and stirring events revolved around both Grace and Elizabeth. There all resemblance ceases.

Elizabeth’s love of flirtation, if only for her country’s sake, was merely a disease like an intermittent fever.

Grace O’Malley had many suitors, some of whom, attracted by her fame, came from what was in those days vast distances to sue ; but she eventually gave her heart, with her hand, to the young chieftain of Ballynahinch, Co. Galway, with the terrible-looking name of Domhnall-an-chogaidh O’Flaherty.

He was a tall, stalwart Irishman, with whom she lived in perfect harmony and happiness till his death. Well had it been for her had he lived longer, but then there would have been nothing so particularly romantic to record about her career.

Accustomed from childhood in her island home to the sea and boating, and having at no time in her life any love of the Saxon rule, she found in the excitement of an adventurous life a means of preventing her mind from dwelling too much upon her loss. What was taken from the Saxon and other foreigners was, in her eyes and those of her followers, not robbery, but merely justifiable annexation, and so she waged, on and off, for some forty years, an inces-

sant and apparently unmolested warfare upon passing vessels from the strongholds which she built,

Her ships were the scourge of the western seas. She would sweep out of apparently inaccessible precipices, through raging seas, and seize the richly-laden galleon vainly attempting to beat up out of her clutches. To strip it of all valuables and as readily disappear with the loot into her adjacent stronghold was an easy matter.

The castle at Achill Sound—Kildownet Castle, to give it its title, considerable remains of which are even now visible, so strongly was it built—was her principal fortress.

Near to it is an ancient graveyard, where it is the custom to leave pipes on the graves after funerals, as at Salruck.

The rectangular tower of the castle has stood the stress of wave and storm for over three centuries, and its massive walls have a good life in them yet. If they could only speak, what accounts of Spanish doubloons and ducats, of rich stuffs and priceless fabrics, of embroideries, of gold and silver drinking-cups, ornaments and trinkets we should hear ! Who knows but even now, in hidden and long-forgotten vaults, secret hoards lie hid ! The ground shews no signs of any excavation.

The castle simply defied any attack that in those days could possibly be made. The position, alone on the south side of the Sound, on a slight promontory, quite hidden from the outer sea, was lovely. The views of the mountains of County Mayo in front are superb, while the seascapes at the mouth of the Sound are unsurpassed for wild splendour. Ships might pass and re-pass a short distance outside in Clew Bay, and never for a moment guess that a passage for ships existed inland. Such a strong and awfully dangerous current sweeps through the Sound at each tide that even now, in these days of accurate soundings and Admiralty charts, mariners prefer to give this narrow passage a wide berth. In those days probably not a soul outside of Grace O'Malley's retainers and crews would even attempt to venture within the Sound.

The cleverness and strategic ability in building the castle at this precise spot are apparent, while the unparalleled loveliness of the position must also have appealed to her Irish sense of beauty in Nature. Her men, knowing every inch of the waterway north and south, could sail their ships and emerge suddenly from the Sound, either in the waters of Clew Bay on the south or Black Sod Bay on the north, just as information reached the pirate leaderess of prey being there sighted. Once in her stronghold she defied capture—on the sea side she was absolutely secure, and from the land side only an enormous and well-equipped army could have caused her trouble, and, even if sent, an army would have to be landed on the island, in those times an impossibility.

Queen Elizabeth was much too occupied to devote a large portion of the nation's forces to suppress this remarkable woman of whom she was frequently hearing. Messages, however, must have passed between the two. Elizabeth's curiosity was aroused, and she desired to see Grace. The descendant of the O'Malleys was as proud and imperious as the English Queen. Probably the female pirate's desire to meet Elizabeth was just as strong ; at any rate, Grace O'Malley crossed over to England with a numerous retinue and much pomp, and made the personal acquaintance of the great monarch. No record of what took place at that meeting of those extraordinary women is extant, and therefore imagination can have full play.

Tradition—and there is plenty current about her in the West of Ireland—has embellished her visit to the great English Queen, and that, too, somewhat minutely too carefully perhaps,

we fear, for exact truth's sake. The dresses of the two remarkable women are even delineated. The meeting is said to have taken place at Hampton Court. "Fancy," says Otway, an old writer on Ireland, "Grana in her loose attire, consisting of a chemise, containing thirty yards of yellow linen wound round her body, with a mantle of freize, coloured madder-red, flung over one shoulder, with her wild hair twisted round a large golden pin as her only headgear, standing with her red legs unstockinged and her broad feet unshod before the stiff and stately Tudor, dressed out, as we see her represented in the portraits of that day, with stays, stomacher, and farthingale, cased like an impregnable armadillo."

The fact remains that, in spite of her black record, Grace O'Malley got safely away from the Queen's clutches, no small achievement in itself, shewing she possessed considerable powers of persuasion and diplomacy. Other contumacious personages lost their heads—physically as well as metaphorically—before they had done with the English Queen. Grace certainly did not the former, and, from what we know of her self-possession, probably not even the latter.

On her way home she landed at Howth, and, as was usual in those days, proceeded to Howth Castle to claim hospitality. It happened to be the hour of dinner, but the castle gates were closed. So shocked was she at this exclusion, most repugnant to her Western notions of Irish hospitality, that she at once returned to the shore, where the young lord was playing with his nurse, and, seizing the child, she immediately re-embarked and sailed with him round the north coast to her Achill home.

After a considerable time and much negotiation she at last allowed the child to return to his parents, but only upon the express stipulation that the gates of Howth Castle should ever afterwards be kept open during the dinner-time—a custom observed to this day. So did she uphold the proverbial apostolic injunction to use hospitality. When looked at in that way, the lesson she taught the lord of Howth Castle may surely be counted unto her for righteousness. The bracing air of Achill was also, no doubt, most beneficial to the young lord.

Finding it extremely difficult for a lone woman to rule men with piratical proclivities, she at last yielded to the importunities of Richard Oileverius Burke and married him. Two children were born to them. The son, Theobald, married Medhbh, daughter of O'Connor Sligo, and the daughter, whose name we do not know, became the wife of one Richard Burke, known to the Saxons as "The Devil's Hook."

To this son-in-law Grace once owed her life when she was in a very tight corner indeed. After the death of her husband in 1586, she went to her castle in Borrisowle (or Burrishoole) on the mainland, with a thousand cows and mares, and obtained letters of safety from Sir Richard Bingham. He treacherously, on the pretext that she had lately plundered Arran, seized her, and after a drumhead court-martial, condemned her to death. A gallows was actually built, and she was bound with a rope and a noose placed around her neck, when "The Devil's Hook" appeared on the scene, and vowed terrible retribution if the sentence were carried into execution. This, coupled with promises of complete restitution, at last prevailed on Sir Richard Bingham, and he released her. With her son-in-law she then fled to Ulster, and lived with O'Neill and O'Donnell, being unable to return to Achill, as all her ships had been taken by Bingham.

Having poured her tale of woe into the ears of Elizabeth, urging advancing age and a desire to cease from evil living, the Queen, through Sir John Perrot, granted her a complete pardon, and she returned to Achill, where she died, and was buried on Clare Island.

Broughton describes her as “ a notable traitress and nurse of all rebellions in the province for forty years,” which only shews how powerful she must have been ; and, after all, he is only voicing the opinion of her enemies. The O’Malleys, Malleys, or Maleys, as they are variously called, are to this day the purest types of Irish men and women in Achill, and are very proud of their descent.

Her name has become proverbial in Ireland as the Irish equivalent of Boadicea, an air is called after her, and one of the many Irish pet names, when children are addressed by their mothers, is a son or daughter of “ Grania Waile” or “ Grania Uaile”—the native form of Grace O’Malley.

The stories about this fascinating personality all over the West of Ireland are endless. They are nearly all traditional, and probably most untrustworthy. Still, be that so, they demonstrate in the clearest manner the undying halo of romance which has ever been associated with her name. Good stories do not crystallize around insignificant, milk-and-water, nondescript persons. It is the strong, strenuous characters for good or evil that mark the ages. A few modern names, around which stories, proper and otherwise, are at the present day beginning to crystallize, will occur to every reader.

One curious story about her is so unusual that it does not bear the impress of pure invention.

A singular item in the marriage contract she made with Sir Richard Burke the Englishman, who, for some reason or other, had adopted the name of M’William Eighter, or Oughter as some historians say, was that the marriage was to last *for certain* but one year. If, at the end of that period, either of the contracting parties said to the other “ I dismiss you,” the union was, *ipso facto*, dissolved. It is said that during that year Grace took good care to put her own faithful followers into garrison in all M’William’s eastward castles that were valuable to her. Then, one fine day, as the Lord of Mayo was coming up to the castle of Corrig-a-Howly, near Newport, Grace spied him and cried out, “ I dismiss you !” History sayeth not how her spouse took the sudden snapping of the matrimonial contract. Perhaps the husband was not sorry. Who knows ?

The romantic story of Grace O’Malley—and Ireland’s past history abounds with many other equally interesting persons—makes one regret that an Irish Sir Walter Scott has not arisen. Had there been such a delightful modern weaver of stories appertaining to the Emerald Isle, Ireland would have been as much, or even more sought after than Scotland. It is wonderful what a novelist can do for a country. As the world gets more and more prosaic, well-told and entrancing half-legendary and half-historical novels are more needed and more read. When will the great Irish novelist arise ? Here is a large—very large—apartment “ To Let.”

Connemara and the neighboring spots of beauty and interest... with remarks on sea and fresh water fishing, Irish character, Archaeology, Botany, etc. (1906)

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