

Ireland : Her Wit, Peculiarities, and Popular Superstitions :

with

Anecdotes, Legendary and Characteristic

by

Distinguished Irish Writers.

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PREFACE

HAD not Shakespere embalmed in the “*Midsummer Night’s Dream*” the Popular Superstitions and Fairy lore current in England at the time of Elizabeth, the present generation could form but a very faint idea of the ancient belief of our fore-fathers in the witcheries of their sylvan deities and household gods. In this utilitarian age it would be superfluous to discuss, or even to enumerate, the causes which have combined to obliterate this poetry of the people in England ; suffice it to say, that it has gradually vanished before the spread of education, and the rapid growth of towns and manufactories.

A wild and daring spirit of adventure—a love of legendary romance—a deep-rooted belief in the supernatural an unconquerable reverence for ancient customs, and an extensive superstitious creed has, from the earliest times, belonged to the Celtic race. We cannot, therefore, wonder that among the but partially civilized, because neglected and uneducated, yet withal chivalrous inhabitants of a large portion of Ireland, a belief in the marvellous should linger even to the present day. It is, however—and chiefly from the causes enumerated in the first chapter of this little work—rapidly becoming obliterated ; never to return. When now I enquire after the old farmer who conducted me, in former years, to the ruined Castle or Abbey, and told me the story of its early history and inhabitants, I hear that he died during the famine. On asking for the peasant who used to sit with me in the ancient Rath, and recite the Fairy legends of the locality, the answer is : “ He is gone to America ;” and the old woman who took me to the Blessed Well, and gave me an account of its wondrous cures and charms — “ Where is she ?” — “ Living in the Workhouse.”

These legendary tales and Popular Superstitions have now become the history of the past—a portion of the traits and characteristics of other days. Will their recital revive their practice ? No ! Nothing contributes more to uproot superstitious rites and forms than to print them ; to make them known to the many instead of leaving them hidden among, and secretly practised by the few.

These tales form part of a large collection made for my amusement many years ago, or which were remembered since my boyhood, and they have been written as a relaxation from severer toil. Several of them have already appeared in the “*Dublin University Magazine.*” They are now collected and presented to the public in their present form, chiefly in the hope of eliciting information from those who may be further acquainted with such matters ; for which purpose I have here subjoined a list of Queries, on which I should like to have answers from my country readers. I have also added a copious index of both names and subjects, which will, I trust, likewise assist in bringing forth new matter. Should this little volume be acceptable, it will be followed by another when time permits.

QUERIES.

Popular Superstitions Generally.

Popular Belief among the Peasantry as to the Existence of Fairies, Fairy Legends, Fairy-Stricken People and Cattle ; with Charms and Cures against such ; Elf-darts, Crystals.

Fairy Lore, Enchantment, Witchcraft, the Evil Eye, and Fairy Abduction.

Herb Cures and Fairy Doctors, Love Charms.

Ancient Customs, Traditions, Folk's Lore, and Proverbs Relating to Superstitious Practices.

Popular Games and Pastimes, with the Rhymes and Recitations used thereat.

Legends Relating to Ancient Forts and Rathes, Grouses, Bawns, Blessed Wells, and Old Burial Places.

The Non-Religious Rites and Ceremonies Relating to Births, Marriages, and Deaths.

Ceremonials Used with a Corpse, and the Forms, Plays, Rhymes, and Keens, employed at Wakes ; Ceremonies used at Funerals and in Grave Yards.

Popular Cures for Diseases, particularly Madness, Bite of a Mad Dog, the King's Evil, Falling Sickness, Fever, Jaundice, Wild-fire, Warts, Childbed, Chincough, and Ague, &c.

The Moon ; Rhymes, Superstitions, and Proverbs, relating to. Prophecies, Curses and Maledictions,

Ceremonies and Popular Usages Respecting Land, and the Preservation of Crops as well as Cattle, Milk, and Butter.

Legends and Superstitions Relating to Lakes and Rivers, with the fabulous Animals said to inhabit them.

Charms Employed against Various Disasters, Sudden Death, Drowning, &c.

Opinions with Regard to Fetches, Ghosts, and Spirits, Supernatural Appearances.

Ideas, Proverbs, and Rhymes current among the Peasantry respecting Different Animals, especially Hares, Weasels, Cats, Rooks, Wildgeese, Cocks, Wrens, Starlings, the Magpie, Raven, Waterwagtail, the Cuckoo, Robin, Dordeel, Mankeeper, Cricket, &c.

Charms appertaining to the Dead Man's Hand.

Rites and Ceremonies used at the following Festivals : New Year's Day, Twelfth Night, Candlemas and St. Bridget's, Shrovetide, St. Valentine's Day, Easter, Whitsuntide, May Day, St. John's Eve, Garlic or Garland Sunday, Palm Sunday, Lady Day, Holy Eve, St. Martin's, Michaelmas, Christmas, St. Stephen's Day, &c., &c.

Irish Popular Superstitions.

CHAPTER I.

Discursive introduction, written in 1849, and to be skipped by those who feel no present interest in Ireland

Revolution in Irish Peasant's Life : its Causes and Effects—Obliteration of Superstitions— Introduction of Darby Doolin—Loss of the Gentry—the Irish Pantheon—Tenant's Rights and Taxes— Demolition of the Popular and Rural Pastimes —The Ordnance Survey—Effect of the Potato Failure on the Popular Mind—Emigration and Patriotism— Who is to be the Buyer ?—What we are, What we may be, and What we ought to be—The Way to Learn English— How to Prove a Man Mad— Quacks—The Last of the Superstitions.

BY the sarcasm of his Don Quixote, Cervantes, it is said, first threw ridicule upon the followers of Amadis de Gaul, checked the spirit of knight-errantry, and in fact sneered away the chivalry of Spain.

No doubt the effect produced by that work was sudden and decisive ; the period, however, was propitious ; light was beginning to shine out from the surrounding darkness, and the people to whom the work was addressed were learned enough to read, and had sufficient wisdom and common sense to appreciate its value, and also wit quick and ready to perceive its point. Rapid as, it is said, was the spread of this revolution of opinion in the Peninsula, and, indeed, throughout civilised Europe generally, it was nothing, in comparison to that which has taken place, and is still going forward, in matters of belief, and popular prejudice, and national opinion, in Ireland.

The great convulsion which society of all grades here has lately experienced, the failure of the potato crop, pestilence, famine, and a most unparalleled extent of emigration, together with bankrupt landlords, pauperizing poor-laws, grinding officials, and decimating workhouses, have broken up the very foundations of social intercourse, have swept away the established theories of political economists, and uprooted many of our long-cherished opinions. In some places, all the domestic usages of life have been outraged ; the tenderest bonds of kindred have been severed, some of the noblest and holiest feelings of human nature have been blotted from the heart, and many of the finest, yet firmest links which united the various classes in the community have been rudely burst asunder. Even the ceremonial of religion has been neglected, and the very rites of sepulture, the most sacred and enduring of all the tributes of affection or respect, have been neglected or forgotten ; the dead body has rotted where it fell, or formed a scanty meal for the famished dogs of the vicinity, or has been thrown, without prayer or mourning, into the adjoining ditch. The hum of the spinning-wheel has long since ceased to form an accompaniment to the colleen's song ; and that song itself, so sweet and fresh in cabin, field, or byre, has scarcely left an echo in our glens, or among the hamlets of our land. The Shannaghie and the Callegh in the chimney corner, tell no more the tale? and legends of other days. Unwaked, *unkeened*, the dead are buried, where Christian burial has at all been observed ; and the ear no longer catches the mournful cadence of the wild Irish cry, wailing on the blast, rising up to us from the valleys, or floating along the winding river, when

“ The skies, the fountains, every region near,
Seemed all one mutual cry.”

The fire on the peasant's hearth was quenched, and its comforts banished, even before his roof-tree fell, while the remnant of the hardiest and most stalwart of the people crawl about, listless spectres, unable or unwilling to rise out of their despair. In this state of things, with depopulation the most terrific which any country ever experienced, on the one hand, and the spread of education, and the introduction of railroads, colleges, industrial and other educational schools, on the other,—together with the rapid decay of the Irish vernacular, in which most of our legends, romantic tales, ballads, and bardic annals, the vestiges of Pagan rites, and the relics of fairy charms were preserved,—can superstition, or if superstitious belief, can superstitious practices continue to exist ?

But these matters of popular belief and folks'-lore, these rites and legends, and superstitions, were after all, *the poetry of the people*, the bond that knit the peasant to the soil, and cheered and solaced many a cottier's fireside. Without these, on the one side, and without proper education and well-directed means of partaking of and enjoying its blessings, on the other, and without rational amusement besides, he will, and must, and has in many instances, already become a perfect brute. The rath which he revered has been, to our knowledge, ploughed up, the ancient thorn which he revered has been cut down, and the sacred well polluted, merely in order to uproot his prejudices, and efface his superstition. Has he been improved by such desecration of the landmarks of the past, objects which, independent of their natural beauty, are often the surest footprints of history ? We fear not.

“ Troth, sir,” said Darby Doolin, an old Connaughtman of our acquaintance, when lately conversing upon the subject, “ what betunc them national boards, and godless colleges, and other sorts of larnin', and the loss of the pratey, and the sickness, and all the people that's goin' to 'Merica, and the crathurs that's forced to go into the workhouse, or is dyin' off in the ditches, and the clargy settin' their faces agin them, and tellin' the people not to give *in* to the likes, sarra wan of the *Gintry* (cross about us !) 'ill be found in the counthry, nor a word about them or their doin's in no time.”

The reader must not from this suppose that our friend Darby in any way commiserated or sympathized with the bankrupt landed gentry, or felt “ sore or sorry” that the landlord and the noble were, *en masse*, reduced to the same condition that the merchant, the trader, or the professional man,

are, from day to day. Oh, no ! These were not the people honest Darby alluded to. Small blame to him if he had but little personal acquaintance with such gentry ; for “ few of them ever stood in the street, or darkened the doors” of the cottages of his native village of Kilmucafaudeen. Darby Doolin’s gentry were, a short time ago at least, *resident*, and transacted their own business without either attorney, money-broker, agent, keeper, driver, or pound-keeper ; they seldom visited London, and much more rarely Paris, or the Brunns of Nassau ; and though reputedly *lucky*, were scarcely ever known to frequent the gambling-table or the horse-race, but lived “ in pace and quietness at home, in the ould ancient habitations of the counthry,” riding by night up and down upon the moonbeams, changing their residences or localities with the whirlwind ; creeping into the russet acorn shells ; sleeping in summer in the purple pendent bells of the foxglove or the wild campanula ; quaffing the Maydew from the gossamer threads of the early morning, and living a merry, social life, singing, dancing, and playing, with wild Eolian music, by the streamlet’s bank, upon the green hill side, or round the grassy fort. And though they neither canted nor dispossessed, never took nor demanded “ male or malt,” head-rent, quit-rent, crown-rent, dues or duties, county-cess, parish-cess, tithes, priest’s dues, poor rates, rates in aid, driverage, poundage, nor murder-money ; [1] employed neither sheriffs, magistrates, barony constables, bailiffs, keepers, drivers, auctioneers, tax-collectors, process-servers, guagers, spies, potten-hussars, police, nor standing army ; passed no promissory notes, and served neither notices to quit, ejections, nor civil bills, they exacted from the people a reverence and a respect such as few potentates, civil, military, or ecclesiastical, could ever boast of.

In most of the leases made in the county of Galway, even twenty years ago,—and we believe the practice was common in other parts of Ireland also, there was, besides the ordinary rent, a covenant for so many pullets, geese and turkeys, so many days’ work in spring and harvest, and so many pounds of grey yarn thread. These remnants of the feudal system were termed duties. The agent, the tithe-proctor, the driver also, and the pound-keeper, had each his dues. Independent of the ordinary legal fees of the latter functionary, there were others which he obtained in this wise. If a man’s cow was in pound, and his family in want of its support, he went to the pound-keeper to get it back, until the day of the *cant* ; instead of leaving it starving, and up to its middle in mud in the pound for a fortnight, he paid the fee. The cattle-jailer took out a piece of paper, the leaf of a book, or the back of a letter—anything, in fact, having printed or written characters upon it—laid it down on the road, and the owner of the beast taking it up, pledged himself upon it to deliver up the animal within the appointed time. Rarely, indeed, was the pledge ever known to be broken, although many a serious riot and at-tempt at rescue had been made on the first capture of the beast.

“ True for you,” says Darby, “ they are going fast, that *gentle* race (the Lord be with them !) but sure you wouldn’t have them wait, them that were always an *out-door* population, to be taken by the scruff of the neck and sent by the guardians and commissioners just to try their feet on the flure of the poor-house, [2] or be shot down like thrushes, as the boys at Ballingarry were. The *good people* are leaving us fast : nobody ever hears now the tic-tac of the *leprechaun*, or finds the cute little chap with his Frenchman’s hat and yellow breeches, sated on a boochalaun bwee of a summer’s morning, with lab-stone on knee, and hammer in hand, tick-tack, tick-tack, welting soles and lasting brogues for his elfin brethren. God be with the time when Donall-na-Trusslog (Daniel of the leaps), met the leprechaun one morning on Rahona bog, with the *adhaster buidhe* (golden bridle, which, whenever shaken was found with the yellow steed attached to it) in the one hand, and the *sporrana-skillinge* (the purse that was never without a shilling) in the other. He laid hold of him, and swore that he should never part him till he had given up these treasures. ‘ Yarrah,’ said the little fellow, ‘ what good is it for you to get them, when that fellow behind you will immediately take them from you ?’

Daniel gave one of his sudden circuitous leaps, but on his turning again to the little fellow, he found, to his eternal grief, that he had scampered off, and was grinning at him from the spray of a bucky briar in the neighbouring hedgerow.

“ Sure the children wouldn’t know anything about the *pooça* but for the story of the blackberries after Michaelmas. [3] The warning voice of the *banshee* is mute ; for there are but few of the ‘ rale ould stock’ to mourn for now ; the *sheogue* and the *thivish* are every year becoming scarcer ; and even the harmless *linane shie* [4] is not talked about now-a-days, and does not hold discourse with e’er a fairy woman in the whole barony, them that were as plenty as lumpers afore the yellow male came amongst us, and made us as wake and as small as a north country rushlight, or a ha’penny herring. [5] No lie to say the times are altered ; sure the snow and the frost itself is lavin’ us.” Darby

Doolin writes us word (for he is a mighty knowledgeable man, and fit to plade with a barrister,) [6] that all the stories about the fairies and the pishogues are going fast, and will soon be lost to us and our heirs for ever.

The old forms and customs, too, are becoming obliterated ; the festivals are unobserved, and the rustic festivities neglected or forgotten; the bowlings, the cakes and the prinkums [7] (the peasants' balls and routs), do not often take place when starvation and pestilence stalk over a country, many parts of which appear as if a destroying army had but recently passed through it. Such is the desolation which whole districts, of Connaught at least, at this moment present ; entire villages being levelled to the ground, the fences broken, the land untilled and often unstocked, and miles of country lying idle and unproductive, without the face of a human being to be seen upon it. The hare has made its form on the hearth, and the lapwing wheels over the ruined cabin, The faction-fights, the hurlings, and the mains of cocks that used to be fought at Shrovetide and Easter, with such other innocent amuse-ments, are past and gone these twenty years, and the mummers and May-boys left off when we were a gossoon no bigger than a pitcher. It was only, however, within those three years that the *waits* ceased to go their rounds upon the cold frosty mornings in our native village at Christmas ; and al-though the " wran boys" still gather a few halfpence on St. Stephen's Day, we understand there wasn't a candle blessed in the chapel, nor a *breedogue* [8] seen in the barony where Kilmucafauden stands, last Candlemas Day ; no, nor even a cock killed in every fifth house, in honour of St. Martin ; and you'd step over the *brosnach* [9] of a bonfire that the childer lighted last St. John's Eve.

The native humour of the people is not so rich and racy as in days of yore ; the full round laugh does not now bubble up from the heart of the Irish girl " when making her toilet at the wayside pool, nor the joke pass from the pedlar or bagman to the pig-driver as they trudge alongside of one another to fair or market. Well, honoured be the name of Theobald Mathew—but, after all, a power of fun went away with the whiskey. The spirits of the people isn't what they were when a man could get drunk for three halfpence, and find a sod on a kippeen [10] over the door of every second cabin in the parish, from Balloughoiaige bridge to the town of Glan. The pilgrimages formerly undertaken to holy wells and sacred shrines for cures and penances have been strenuously interdicted ; the wells themselves neglected, the festival days of their saints passed by, and their virtues forgotten ; their legends, too, often of great interest to the topographer and historian, and many of which were recounted by the bards and annalists of earlier times, are untold ; and the very sites of many of these localities are at present unknown. The fairies, the whole pantheon of Irish demigods are retiring, one by one, from the habitations of man to the distant islands where the wild waves of the Atlantic raise their foaming crests, to render their fastnesses inaccessible to the schoolmaster and the railroad engineer ; or they have fled to the mountain passes, and have taken up their abodes in those wild romantic glens—lurking in the gorgeous yellow furze and purple heath, amidst the savage disrupted rocks, or creeping be-neath the warrior's grave, learnedly, but erroneously, called the Druid Crumlegh—where the legend preserved by the antiquary, or the name transmitted by the topographer, alone marks their present habitation. When the peasant passes through these situations now he forgets to murmur the prayer which was known to preserve from harm those who trod the paths of the " good people," and, by thrusting his thumb between his fore and middle finger, to make the sign of the cross indeed, he scarcely remembers to cross himself at all ; and in a few years to come the localities of the fairies will be altogether forgotten. The wild strains of aerial music which floated round the ancient rath, and sung the matin and the vesper of the shepherd boy, who kept his flocks hard by, are heard no more, and the romance of elfin life is no longer recited to amuse or warn the rising peasant generation. To the loghouse by the broad waters of the Ohio or the Mississippi, to the wild monotonous Australian prairie, or even to the golden soil of California, the emigrant has carried the fairy lore of the mother country ; so that, to the charming descriptions of our country woman, Mrs. Hall—to the traits and stories of William Carleton—the happy illustration of Irish manners by Banim and Gerald Griffin—the pencillings of Lady Chatterton, or the graphic sketches of Caesar Otway and Samuel Lover but, above all, to the Munster legends, embalmed by Crofton Croker, must the enquirer after fairy lore refer, who would seek for information on such matters in Ireland twenty years to come. [11]

Would that the Irish emigrant carried with him his superstitions only. But no. In the rankling hatred towards the English rule in Ireland—increased by the very circumstances under which so many of our countrymen now quit our shores, fostered and transmitted unalloyed for generations to a foreign soil—has future England more to fear from future America in case of national war, than all the rebellions and agitations which punity Ireland could possibly excite, now or heireafter.

The ordnance survey, of which we feel so justly proud, is a case in point. It was commenced in 1825, and finished a few years ago. Eminent scholars, well acquainted with the language and habits of the people, and educated up to the point required, traversed the country in all directions, talked with, and lived among the people, for the purpose of fixing ancient boundaries, testing the accuracy and value of ancient documents, and collecting that great amount of traditional, antiquarian, and topo-graphical information which our ordnance records at present embody ; while another class of men were occupied at home in arranging, collating, testing with ancient Gaelic manuscripts, and finally preserving the information transmitted to them by the former. Could the materials then obtained be collected now ? No. we may confidently appeal to Larcom, Petrie, O'Donovan, Curry, and other eminent men employed upon that great national work, for the truth of this assertion.

The dynasties of Europe have been shaken ; many of the most ancient governments overthrown ; and the whole of the continent convulsed with internal strife, or shaken by sudden change as the late tempest of revolution swept along its plains and leaped over its mountain tops. The very Pope himself, the head of the most widely-spread and numerous sect of Christians in the world, has been rudely driven from the seat of St Peter, a wanderer and an exile, though assisted by the contributions of the “*starving Irish* !” and in all probability his temporal power has been much abridged or even annihilated : but what are these revolutions to that which has been and is now effecting in Ireland by the failure of a single article of diet ? All these countries will settle down, more or less, into the condition in which they were before 1848. Some change emperors—young ones for old—though, as in the case of Aladdin's lamp. the change may not be for the better ; others discard kings, and, under the name of republicanism, enjoy presidents or dictators ; parliaments appear to be the panacea with one set of people, and a scoffing disregard of excommunication the chief delight and boast of another ; but in the end it will be found that they will nearly all shake down with a very little more or very little less of liberty than they had in the beginning of the year 1848. [12] The German will twist his moustache, smoke, and live on his beer and sour krout ; and the Frenchman drink his wine at three sous a bottle, shrug his shoulders, and enjoy his fête as before. Not so the Irishman ; all his habits and modes of life, his very nature, position, and standing in the social scale of creation, will and must be altered by the loss of his potato. Ay, even more than if he was suddenly compelled to turn Mahommedan,—chang-ing all his chapels, churches, and meeting-houses into mosques, or had a parliament going round with the judge of assize, and sitting in every county town in Ireland twice a-year.

“ I was n't asey in myself,” says our old friend Darby, “ till I wrote to tell you all the doins that's gettin' on with in the counthry, and how, if times does n't mind, I'll sell the two little slips [13]—them that was bonoveens on last Lady-day and gather in the trifle of money that's due me out of the gombeen [14] these two years ; and when I've made *baton* [15] of the meddin, and dishposed of the cabin and the little garden to Phauric Brannach, I'll be after takin' myself and the ould woman to the place they're diggin' up the goold as thick as poorens [16] used to be in harvest. Besides, I'm noways continted at stayin' here at this present writin', and I'm tould Colonel Browne is watching me like a terrier after a weasel. Whisht ! sure avourneen, I was out in the 'ruction in '98 ; and I walked all the ways to see Dan (the heavens be his bed this night !) at Tara, and bring home a sod from off the grave of the boys we planted there the night afore I ran back into Connaught—just to the ould spud, where your own four bones were bred and born, a one side of Rawcroghan.”

If ever there was a nation that clung to the soil, and earned patriotism by the love of the very ground they walk on, it is (or we may now write was) the Irish peasantry. The Jew carries about with him from land to land a portion of the soil of Palestine, that it may mingle with his grave. Lately, when the author of the “*Pleasures of Hope*” was interred, a deputation of the Poles of London cast into his tomb—an offering to his genius—some earth from the grave of Kosciusko. Not many years ago, we stood upon the custom-house quays of Dublin, watching a large emigrant ship, bound for St. John's, getting under weigh. The wind and tide were favourable ; the captain was impatient, and the names of the passengers having been called over, it was found that one was missing, a stout labourer from Kilkenny, a great favourite with his neighbours and fellow-passengers. The captain swore, as captains will on such occasions, that he would not wait a moment for the rascal, who, he supposed, was “ getting drunk” in some of the neighbouring public-houses. [17] The prayers and entreaties of his fellow-passengers were in vain ; the last plank was about to be hauled on board, when the missing passenger rushed breathless through the crowd towards the ship, carrying in his hands a green sod. about as large as that used to “ estate” a lark, which he had just cut from one of the neighbouring fields. “ Well,” said he, as he gained the deck, amidst the shouts of his friends, “ with the blessing of God, I'll have this over me in the new country.” Was not this patriotism ?

There is at present a spring tide of emigration from Ireland, and great is the rejoicing of those who imagine we are to be benefited by it ;— the Malthusian who feared for the consequences of over-population (although we are inclined to believe the country was not much over-populated as a whole, although it certainly was most unequally populated) ; the ratepayer, who is now paying twenty-five shillings and sixpence in the pound ! and the landlord who is buying up the small holdings for three or five pounds each, from those who “ cumber the ground.” Every one who can muster three pounds ten by the pledge of his crop, or for the good-will of his holding, or by “ making-off “ with the rent, or by any means within his power ; all the able-bodied among the people, from the snug yeoman and frieze-coated cottier to the top-booted buckeen, are on the move for America, leaving us the idle and ill-conditioned, the weakly, the decrepid, the aged and the orphan, to be supported in our workhouses, or to drag out a miserable existence begging from door to door,—so that it may well be said, the heart of Ireland now beats in America. The sums of money that are returned to this country from the western continent daily, for the purpose of taking out emigrants, are quite astonishing. Not only that, but the feelings with which they leave are becoming altered. There is scarcely an observer of Irish manners, or who has mixed much among the people, that has not witnessed many heart-rending scenes at the parting of emigrants for some years past. It was not amidst the noise and bustle of the crowded quay that these outpourings of the heart could always be seen ; but by the canal’s banks, when the “ whole country side” came to bless and bid adieu to the travellers, and crowded round at every lock and station for miles along the road, raising at times the wild Irish cry, and often forcing their way upon deck to have another last embrace. We remember many such scenes ten or twelve years ago. There was one instance, in particular, which struck us not only as characteristic of a mother’s love, but of the ideas which the Irish peasantry possessed on the subject of the new continent, and of the complete earthly severing which took place when friends and relations parted on the Bog of Allen. The Royal Canal packet-boat, dragged by a pair of lazy garrauns at the rate of three miles an hour, had taken in a cargo of emigrants, principally labourers from the county of Longford. Their friends followed for a considerable distance, many, brimful of whisky as well as grief, crowding upon the bridges, and sometimes pulling the boat to the brink by the tow-rope, for the purpose of sending a message to one of their transatlantic friends,—to the great terror and no small danger of the non-emigrating passengers. All gradually fell back, except one very old woman, who, with her grey elf-locks stream-ing in the wind, her petticoat tucked above the knees, and her old red cloak floating free from her shoulders, still, with unabated energy, ran after the vessel which contained her only son. He was a red-headed freckled-faced *codger* of about, twenty years of age, rather diminutive in size, but what is called *set* in his build, clad in a huge whitish frieze *coatha more*, corduroy smalls open at the knees, a Killamanka waist-coat, and a grinder round his neck, and with sullen looks, trembling lips, and swollen eyes, sat upon his *chist*, with his legs hanging over the side of the vessel. Whenever our speed slackened, or we came to a lock, or any impediment stopped our way, the poor woman knelt down and offered up a fervent prayer for the child she was parting with for ever, and occasionally gave him some advice as to his future conduct. At last, having invoked, with all the eloquence of frantic grief, a blessing upon his head, she cried out, “ Orah, Thomasseen, don’t forget to say your prayers, and never change your voice nor your colour when you go among the blacks.” [18]

What a difference has ten years made in the feelings of the Irish peasant ! He now no longer looks forward to better or happier times in his father-land ; seed-time and harvest, the price of pigs or the rise of grain, enter not into his calculations ; but he turns with a longing eye to his far-distant destination in the west, and he starves, and grinds, and toils, not for the good of the land which gave him birth, but to amass and husband the means which are to transport him for ever from his once-loved Erin. The friends who now accompany the band of emigrants to the railway terminus part as if they were but going into the next county “ Well, Jim, God be with you, and a safe journey to you ; take care of the woman that owns you, and remember me to Biddy Sullivan. Tell her I’ll be after you agin Aesther.” The bell rings, the shrill whistle of the engine gives the warning note, and the parting is over. [19]

Take care, landlords, gentlemen, and governors of Ireland. The clearing system, if not carried too far, has been, at least, carried on too rapidly. Had you improved the condition of the peasantry, or even attempted to do so, some twenty years ago, you might not have to support them in the poor-house now, nor receive their dying malediction. You may want the labourer yet ; the English farmer also may require the aid of the *spalpeen* before harvest is over. We will not press this subject further, at a time when almost every hand and every pen is raised against the landed proprietors indiscriminately, and when, perhaps, one of our next essays may be upon the *paleontology* of the Connaught estated gentry, as well as those who reside in the butter-cups and among the raths and

mounds erected by our ancestors. [This, it must be recollected, was written in the Spring of 1849. How truly it has turned out, the past year proves.]

At our request, however, Darby has remained to see what the end of all agitation,—if such a thing is possible in Ireland,—and the next harvest may do for the country. Perhaps we have been somewhat selfish in this respect, for, as he has long been considered the knowingest man in the whole country, and could tell more stories about the old times and the “good people,” and knew more about cures and charms than “all the books that were ever shut and opened,” and was up to the genealogy of all the ancient families, and had been at every bawne and coort [20] in Connaught as often as he had fingers and toes, we desired to preserve some of his curious lore before he crossed the Atlantic in his old age.

If, however, we cannot hope much for the future, let us for the present, at least, live in the memory of the past.

We are now in the transition state, passing through the fiery ordeal from which it is hoped we are to arise purified from laziness and inactivity, an honest, truth-telling, hard-working, industrious, murder-hating, business-minding, rent-paying, self-relying, well-clad, sober, cooking, healthy, thriving, peaceable, loyal, independent, Saxon-loving people; engaged all day long, and every day except Sundays (though Archbishop Whately, more power to him! would back us at a hurling on that same), in sowing and mowing, tilling and reaping, raising flax, fattening bullocks, and salting pork, or fishing and mending our nets and lobster-pots; instead of being a poor, dependent, untruthful, idle, ignorant, dirty, slinging, *sleeven*, cringing, begging set; governed by the bayonet or the bribe; generally mis-understood; always *sould* by the agitator at home, and the number abroad; ground down by the pauper absentee or his tyrannical agent; bullied by the petty sessions magistrates; alternately insulted and cajoled by the minister of the day, misrepresented and scandalized as Whig and Tory prevailed; bullied by the Browns and Beresfords to-day, worshiping O’Connell to-morrow; vilified by the London press, and demoralized by charity jobbing. In fact, the most ill-used, and, to adopt the phras-eology of Mr. Doolin, “the most jury-packing, road-jobbing, paper-reading, buckeen-breeding, sea-bathing, car-driving, cockle-eating, cup-tossing, tea-and-whisky-drinking, ribbon-lodging, orange-lodging, fighting, shouting, landlord-shooting, pig-jobbingest, potato-lovingest, good-for-nothingest nation on the face of the universal globe.” All this is to be set aside, and all the good we have des-cribed, and more to boot is, it is said, to be brought about, and we hope to live to see the day it may come to pass, though we don’t know exactly how it is to be effected.

Repeal is dead; its ghost was last seen at Ballingarry, but vanished in smoke and a flash of fire; some say it is hid in a cave in Slievenamon; but I don’t give in to that. O’Connellism was kilt by the young Irishmen, who blew themselves up with the infernal machine with which they had arranged to shoot Dan and the sodgers. Education, emigration, Queen’s colleges, Cashel synods, stopping the Maynooth grant, discriminating rates, rates in aid, and other variations in the poor-laws; soil analysis, green crops, agricultural missionaries, model-farms, manufactories, rotatory parliaments, quakers, fisheries, suspension of the habeas corpus, ecclesiastical titles bills, waste land improvements, paying the priests and putting down the establishment, arming the Orangemen, and “Peel” plantations, with a thousand other speculations, schemes, and propositions, have each their advocates. One thing, how-ever, is certain, the great bulk of the land in the west and south must change owners; sooner or later it must come into the market either in wholesale or retail, and now the sooner the better. But who will be the buyers? Oh! Englishmen—English capital, that is what we want. “Just wait a bit;” we have been planted, replanted, and transplanted by the English and Scotch on several occasions, and in various ways; we are, it may now be said, undergoing the process of subsoil ploughing; the great bulk of the old population in the south and west is being put *under the sod*, and we sincerely trust the noxious weeds may be got rid of in the process. Let it, however, be remembered what the country gained by these various plantations: the “mere Irish” were driven like wolves into the wilds and fast-nesses of Donegal and Connaught, without their condition being one iota improved in two centuries. The Cromwellian soldier has, in some instances, become the Tipperary murderer. At the Boyne this country changed masters, and the land its owners—the native Irish gentleman, the adherent of the Stuarts, was replaced by the victorious English captain or lieutenant, whose descendants are now some of the first to “go to the wall,” although these persons obtained the fee of their estates merely on condition of their driving out the Celts; and as to the hired Scotch agriculturists, they never ef-fected a single improvement outside their employer’s demesne, or bettered the condition of the Irish farmer in any respect.

Well, no matter what comes, we'll lose the *gintry*, so we have made arrangement with Darby and some of our old Connaught acquaintances, aided by friends in the other provinces, to furnish us, from time to time, with a few particulars about the old customs and social antiquities of Ireland, especially such as have not already appeared, at any length, in print. It is possible, however, that we may frequently be found quoting inadvertently without acknowledgment, as the old newspapers and magazines constantly recorded instances of superstition ; and the local histories also mention many such. It would be impossible, indeed, to say how often we are making use of, without acknowledgment, the numerous contributions afforded us by our country friends.

This is, as our readers, who have been able to follow us thus far, have already perceived, rather a discursive chapter, but so is our subject, which has been taken up like the sybil's leaves, disarranged, in rags and patches, as time, opportunity, or the immediate matter in hand invited. We have already alluded to the decay of the Irish language as one of the means by which our legends and superstitions are becoming obliterated. It is scarcely possible to conceive the rapidity with which this is being effected, or the means taken to bring it about. We may relate the following incident as characteristic of the love of learning, and the spread of education among the peasantry in the west of Ireland, as well as the means forcibly employed to expunge the Gaelic as a spoken language. Some years ago we were benighted on a summer evening by the shores of Loch Ina, near the foot of those picturesque mountains, called the twelve pins of Benna-Beola, in Connemara. Our guide conducted us to a neighbouring village, where we were received for the night with that hospitality which has for ever been the characteristic of those wild mountaineers. While supper was preparing, and the potatoes laughing and steaming in the *skieh* [21] the children gathered round to have a look at the stranger, and one of them, a little boy about eight years of age, addressed a short sentence in Irish to his sister, but meeting the father's eye, he immediately cowered back, having, to all appearance, committed some heinous fault. The man called the child to him, said nothing, but drawing forth from its dress a little stick, commonly called a screen or tally, which was suspended by a string round the neck, put an additional notch in it with his penknife. Upon our inquiring into the cause of this proceeding, we were told that it was done to prevent the child speaking Irish ; for every time he attempted to do so a new nick was put in his tally, and when these amounted to a certain number, summary punishment was inflicted upon him by the schoolmaster. Every child in the village was similarly circumstanced, and whoever heard one of them speak a word of Irish was authorized to insert the fatal nick. We asked the father if he did not love the Irish language—indeed the man scarcely spoke any other ; “ I do,” said he, his eye kindling with enthusiasm ; “ sure it is the talk of the ould country, and the ould times, the language of my father and all that's gone before me—the speech of these mountains, and lakes, and these glens, where I was bred and born ; but you know,” he continued, “ the children must have larin', and, as they tache no Irish in the National School, we must have recourse to this to instigate them to talk English.” Upon further inquiry we found that the school alluded to was upwards of three miles distant, and that one of the able-bodied villagers escorted the children there each day, summer and winter, occasionally carrying the weak, and conducting the party with safety across the fords, and through some difficult passes which intervened. We have known a young man, who had assumed a very *fine* English accent, twitted with the circumstance of his having once carried the “ *score*” by being told, “ Arrah, leave off your English, 'tishn't so long since the beam was round your neck.”

The fairy legends and traditions of the south of Ireland—the Cluricaune, the Merrow, the Duhallane, and the O'Donohues, &c., have been already faithfully described by Crofton Croker ; but the subject is by no means exhausted, even in Munster ; while a new set of elves, spirits, and goblin influences, with somewhat different ideas attached to each, pervade the west, particularly the counties of Mayo and Galway, and the isles which speckle the wild Atlantic along their shores—the group of Arran, Turk, Boffin, Innis Shark, Clare Island, Achill, and from Innis-Beagle to the far-famed Innis-Murray, opposite to the Sligo coast. Even when the legend common to the south or north is retained in these localities, it is in a new dress, with new dramatis personæ, and entirely new scenery, machinery, decorations, and processions ; thus, the story of Daniel O'Rourke is told upon a winter's night, by the laussogue's blaze, [22] in the Islands of Shark and Boffin, under the name of Terence O'Flaherty, as a warning to the stayers out late, by people who never heard of the “ Munster Legends,” to which we have alluded, [23] The phraseology of our Connaught story-teller is also different in many respects from that of the northern or Munsterman, as may be gleaned from this chapter.

But it is not in the west, or among what is termed the true Celtic population alone, that superstitions and mystic rites are still practised. We have fortune-tellers within the Circular-road of Dublin ! and fairy doctors, of repute, living but a few miles from the metropolis. Not six months ago

a man was transported for ten years for so far practising upon the credulity of a comfortable family in the county of Longford, as to obtain sums of money, by making them believe he was their deceased father, who was not dead, but only among the *good people*, and permitted to return occasionally to visit his friends. While we write, a country newspaper informs us of the body of a child having been disinterred at Oran, in the County Roscommon, and its arms cut off, to be employed in the performance of certain mystic rites. About a year ago a man in the county of Kerry roasted his child to death, under the impression that it was a fairy. He was not brought to trial, as the crown prosecutor mercifully looked upon him as insane.

Madness has either been assumed, or sworn to, as a means of getting off prisoners, on more than one occasion, to our own knowledge. We remember sitting, some years ago, beside a celebrated veteran prisoner's counsel, in a county town in Connaught, who was defending a man on his trial for murder, committed apparently without provocation, in the open day, and before a number of witnesses ; the prisoner having, with a heavy spade, clove through the skull of his unresisting victim. The defence intended to be set up was, as usual, an alibi.

Numbers of people were ready to come forward and swear he was not, and could not be, at the place specified in the indictment at all. As the trial proceeded, however, the sagacious lawyer, entrusted with the defence, at once saw that he had not a leg to stand on, and, turning abruptly to the prisoner's attorney, swore with an oath bigger than that taken by any of the witnesses, " He'll be hanged. Could you not prove him mad ?"

" Oh ! yes ; ' mad as a March hare.' I'll get plenty of people to prove that," was the solicitor's ready reply.

" But did you ever know of his doing anything out of the way ? Now, did you ever hear of his eating his shoes, or the likes of that ?"

" Shoes ? I'll get you a man that will swear he eat a new pair of brogues, nails and all."

" Well, then," said the barrister, " put him up ; and let us get our dinner."

The attorney retired to look after his witnesses, while a prolonged cross-examination of one of the prosecutors then upon the table, enabled the " sharp practitioner" to alter his tactics and prepare for the defence. Accordingly, the very first witness produced for the defence swore to the insanity of the prisoner ; and the intelligent jury believing in the truth of the brogue-eating, including the digestion of tips, heel-taps, sole-nails, squares, tacks, sprigs, hangups, pavours and sparables, acquitted the prisoner ! He was about to be discharged from the dock, when the judge committed him to a lunatic asylum.

During a recent assizes, in one of the southern counties, a witness, who prevaricated not a little, was rather roughly interrogated in her cross-examination, as to the nature of an oath, and the awful consequences of breaking it " Do you know, my *good* girl," thundered the crown lawyer, " what would happen to you if you perjured yourself ?"

" Troth, I do well, sir," said she ; " I wouldn't get my expinses."

There are certain types of superstition common to almost all countries in similar states of progress or civilization, and others which abound in nearly every condition of society ; and strange to say, what was science—written, acknowledged, and accepted—science not more than two centuries ago, is now pronounced vulgar error and popular superstition. It would, no doubt, form a subject of great interest to trace back our traditional antiquities, and to compare them one with another—the German and Scandinavian with the Irish, Scotch, or English—those of the western and eastern continents generally, with the rites and ceremonies, or opinions, of which vestiges still exist among ourselves ; when, in-deed, strange affinities and similarities would be found to obtain among the North American Indians, and the Burmese and other Orientals, with those even yet practised in the Irish highlands and islands ; but this would be a laborious task, and unsuited to the pages of our work, or to the popular elucidation of our fairy lore.

Of all superstitions, the medical lingers longest, perhaps, because the incentive to its existence must remain, while disease, real or imaginary—either that capable of relief, or totally incurable—

continues to afflict mankind, and, therefore, in every country, no matter how civilized, the quack, the mountebank, the charm-worker, and the medico-religious impostor and nostrum-vendor, will find a gullable, *payable* public to prey upon. The only difference between the water-doctor living in his schloss, the mesmeriser practising in the lordly hall, or the cancer and the consumption curer of the count or duchess, spending five thousand a-year in advertisements, paid into the queen's exchequer, who drives his carriage and lives in Soho-square, and the "medicine man" of the Indian, or the "knowledgeable woman" of the half-savage islander, residing in a hut cut out of the side of a bog-hole, or formed in the cleft of a granite rock, is, that the former are almost invariably wilful impostors, and the latter frequently believe firmly in the efficacy of their art, and often refuse payment for its exercise.

- [1] It is but too fully established that in most instances of agrarian murder, the whole townland was compelled to contribute to the price paid for the bloody deed, or heavily taxed to support the murderer, or pay his passage to America.
- [2] We lately expostulated with one of our old beggars as to why she did not go into the poor-house "Arrah, sure agra, I wouldn't be alive a week in it ; I that's ate up with the rheumatics ; troth, I went there the other day, jist to try my feet on the flure, and I wouldn't be alive in it a week," was the graphic reply.
- [3] It is a popular belief kept up probably to prevent children eating them when over ripe—that the *poooca*, as he rides over the country, defiles the blackberries at Michaelmas and Holly-eve.
- [4] These various personages, and the ideas attached to them, will be explained during the course of these papers. The representation of the "The Lianhan Shee," as given by Carleton, in his "Traits and Stories," does not hold good in the west, where that familiar spirit is looked upon as a much more innocuous attendant of the fairy woman. The leprechaun, or clurichaun, as he is termed in Munster, and the banshee and phooka, or poooca, the Puck of Shakspeare, are already known, even to English readers. The sheeogue is the true fairy ; thivishes or thoushas (shadowy apparitions) are literally ghosts ; and pisherogues, or pishogues, a term used both in the Irish manuscripts and in the vernacular, means properly witchcraft or enchantment.
- [5] The *laffeen scuddaun*, or halfpenny herring, is often used as a term of insignificance.
- [6] By the term "barrister," the Irishman does not mean a lawyer generally, but the county assistant barrister, who is held in great veneration. In Ireland we have the lawyer, the councillor, and the barrister.
- [7] In Connaught, in former times, when a dance was held on a Sunday evening at a cross-roads, or any public place of resort, a large cake, like what is called barnbrack, with a variety of apocryphal birds, fabulous fishes, and outlandish quadrupeds, such as are only known in heraldic zoology, raised in bold relief on its upper crust, was placed on the top of a churn-dash, and tied over with a clean white cloth ; the staff of the churn-dash was then planted out-side the door as a sign of the fun and amusement going on within. When they had danced and drank their fill, the *likeliest* boy took the prettiest colleen, and led her out to the cake, and placed it in her hands as Queen of the Feast ; it was then divided among the guests, and the festivities continued. The word *prinkum* is sometimes used in the county Galway, to express a great rout or merry-making, in which dancing, courting, coshering, whisky-drinking, card-playing, fighting, and sometimes a little ribbonism, form the chief diversions.
- [8] The *breedogue* was an image of St. Bridget, generally styled by the country girls "Miss Biddy" It was carried about on the 1st of February. As one of the objects of this little work is to record the "humours" and ceremonials of this and other like festivals, formerly observed in Ireland, it is unnecessary to enter further into their description in the notes to the present chapter.
- [9] The term *brosnach* is generally applied to an armful or an apronful of sticks used for firing ; it literally means a bundle of rotten sticks for firing. A brusna of furze is carried on the back.
- [10] A sod of turf stuck on a sally switch or kippeen, and placed in the thatch of an Irish cabin, is the sign of "good liquor within"
- [11] The best of all our fairy tales are, perhaps, the "Superstitions of the Irish Peasantry," in the volumes of the "London and Dublin Magazine," published from 1825 to 1828. "The Newry Magazine," and "Bolster's Cork Magazine," also contain much interesting information on this subject.

One of our most learned and observant Roman Catholic friends has just written to us, in answer to some queries relative to superstitions—"The tone of society in Ireland is becoming more and more 'Protestant' every year : the literature is a Protestant one, and even the priests are becoming more Protestant in their conversation and manners. They have condemned all the holy wells and

resorts of pilgrims, with the single exception of Lough Derg, and of this they are ashamed : for, whenever a Protestant goes upon the Island, the ceremonies are stopped ! Among all the affectionate mentions of his dearly-beloved father made by John O'Connell, he had not the courage to say ' *the Lord rest his sowle.*' I have watched these changes with great interest."

- [12] This assertion was printed in the " Dublin University Magazine" for May, 1849. Subsequent events have proved its truth.
- [13] Slip is the term applied to a young pig, of from six months to one year old ; while bonov, or bonoveen, means a piggin-riggin, or sucking-pig, or one much younger than a slip.
- [14] *Gombeens* means lending out money or provisions upon an exorbitant and most usurious rate of interest ; by it, however, has commenced the foundation of many a considerable fortune. A gombeen man is among the country people what the bill-broker and money-lender is among the higher classes.
- [15] *Baton*—skinning the land and burning it, in order to extract its utmost value as manure. Various acts of parliament are in force against this most injurious practice ; but it is still had recourse to, particularly in Monaghan, to the detriment of both land and landlord.
- [16] *Poreens*—small potatoes.
- [17] The facetious, witty, and sarcastic Brennan was once asked at dinner, whether he did not like to be drunk ? " No, ma'am," was his reply, " but like to be *getting* drunk."
- [18] Even in the northern, and more independent and comfortable, because more educated and industrious counties, a certain season, usually in spring, was set apart for emigrating, and it was always one of mourning and lamentation. In the west, during the emigrating season, of late years, the canal company were obliged to employ police to travel with the packet-boat, in order to keep back and preserve order among the crowds which rushed on board whenever the vessel approached a landing-place. About five years ago, a frightful accident occurred upon the Royal Canal, near Dublin; the boat was overpowered by numbers both of emigrants and their friends, and sinking with great rapidity, upwards of fourteen persons were drowned.
- [19] Considerable surprise has been excited, not only at the quantity of money transmitted to their friends in this country by emigrants, but at the very short time which elapsed between the period of their landing in America and the arrival of the money-order in Ireland. It must not, however, be supposed that the money has been all earned by the emigrant within that short space. To raise the sum required for bringing out one or more of his family, the peasant or the artizan—but principally the former mortgages his labour for a certain time to a farmer, or other employer, who, glad to procure a good workman for a certain stipulated rate of wages, advances the necessary supply.
- [20] *Bawne* : an inclosed keep an ancient castle. A modern noble residence is frequently called a court, or court.
- [21] *Skiehogue, skib, skieh*, the oval basket in which potatoes are strained.
- [22] *Fassogue, Lassogue*, or sup a piece of dry bog-deal used as a torch.
- [23] The story of Daniel O'Rourke appeared many years before the publication of the Munster Legends, in a periodical called the " Dundee Repository."

Ireland : her wit, peculiarities, and popular superstitions: with anecdotes, legendary and characteristic ([n.d.]

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