

## Jeremiah Curtin in Ireland

### *Memoirs of Jeremiah Curtin*

*I decided that I would go to Europe before resuming work at the bureau of ethnology and I arranged to leave Vermont September 19. Our trunks were packed, and we were ready to start when I was seized with a severe chill, and before the day was over pneumonia developed. For three weeks I was dangerously ill, then I slowly recovered. We left Vermont the 12th of December. In Boston I received the first copy of *The Deluge*, Work accomplished brings its reward. I always welcome with joy the first copy of a new book. It rouses my mental energy. I think of the books that I want to write and of those I want to translate, and an unconquerable desire seizes me to crowd more work into each day.*

### The Second Irish Period (1891-93)

The 16th of December we sailed for Queenstown on the *City of Chicago*. Christmas morning the Irish coast was sighted. In Cork there was no conveyance at the station. It was 'Christmas.' At last I succeeded in getting two side-cars, one for ourselves and one for our baggage, two trunks and a heavy box of books. I thought the weight of the baggage would be too great for the poor, old horse, but evidently he was far stronger than he looked. At the Royal Victoria we were warmly greeted by Mrs. Wilson, the proprietress. Four years had changed her from an ardent O'Brien advocate to an enthusiastic Parnellite. We ate our Christmas dinner in her private dining room and met there Father Doyle, bishop of New South Wales, a well informed man overflowing with mirth and wit. He had traveled in the United States and had seen the great trees of Yosemite valley, but they did not impress him. He had seen larger trees in the jungles of New South Wales.

On New Year's day we started for Dingle. The weather was perfect ; the country beautiful. From Tralee, where we spent the night, it is fifty miles by train to Dingle, but it took three long hours to make the journey. The only passengers in the car with us were four nuns and an Irish fop with an English monocle. I tried to talk with the nuns, but, though born in Tralee, they knew nothing about the country we were passing through. The views along the road were fine. In Ireland the effect of sunlight and shadow is wonderful, and cloud views are magnificent. That day there was moisture in the air ; while some of the hills were in sunshine. on others, not far away, rain was falling. I saw a number of rainbows. One, particularly beautiful, hung over the peak of a low hill near Tralee bay. It was very wide, and the shades of red and green were unusually bright. When going from the station in Dingle to the hotel, I saw a wonderful rainbow. One end was off in a field, the other came down to the sidewalk, not forty feet in front of us. It vanished. The pot of gold was not to be seen.

There were two hotels in Dingle. I stopped at Lee's. After considerable trouble in getting a comfortable room and a luncheon, we went out to look around. Aside from the hotels, a bank, a Catholic church, a large convent, and many shops, the town is made up of small stone houses that are one-story high and connected. The floors in those houses are of mother earth. In front of the houses is a stone sidewalk, and beyond the sidewalk a ditch with running water. As I passed one of these houses, I saw a man weaving. Looking over the half door I asked if I could come in. ' And welcome,' was the cordial answer. The weaver opened the door, drove two pigs out, and we went in. He wished to tell me about his weaving and about the years he had spent in America soon after the Civil war, but the pigs, not accustomed to being outside, squealed so persistently that it was impossible to hear a word. At last the master of the house opened the door and let them in. On our way back to the hotel it began to rain. From one of the houses a man called, ' Come in, and wait !' To make room for us he drove out two pigs. Determined to get back they squealed viciously. The woman of the house let them in and to keep them quiet fed them, putting the food down on the earth floor. Several hens shared the unusual meal.

I could not find men in Dingle who knew Gaelic stories. A man by the name of Ferriter told me many interesting things—domestic tragedies, not myths. He had suffered much and had been three times in prison for serving his people and his country. While I was at Lee's hotel, the agent of the Earl of Cork arrived to collect rents. He came to that poor region twice each year. If a man's rent for house or farm was not ready, the agent gave him three months to get it. If he did not have it at the end of that time, a writ was served, and he was evicted. The agent was a burly, blustering mam said to be merciless. One farmer told him that his wife had been sick for months, and that a horse had died on him. The agent's answer was : ' If all your cattle die, I must have the rent.'

A good many men from surrounding villages came in to pay rent, others came to see what took place. Among the crowd I found a man, a Mr. Lynch, who knew a number of myths and was willing to tell them. His home was near Ventry strand. For several days he came to me. Then, as he was very old, I decided to establish myself as near his village as possible. About this time I received an autograph letter from William K. Gladstone congratulating me on my knowledge of languages and on my success as a mythologist. His words had the ring of pure gold ; they gave me deep gratification.

In Dingle I became acquainted with Maurice Fitzgerald, a man who owned a two-story house at Ventry strand and was willing to rent me the upper story. When I went out to take possession, the rooms were not ready. Fitzgerald's wife, two or three other women, and a mute—a beggar going from house to house—sat around a turf fire in the kitchen. After a while the rooms were in order but they could not be heated till Fitzgerald sent to town for stovepipe. That night the wind blew fiercely, the house shook, the turf fire smoked, the sleeping room was cold, the bedding was damp and musty. The price paid for ancient lore is not small.

The next morning Lynch came, and story-telling began. A strong, willing girl was found to take care of the rooms and cook for us. Fitzgerald got the pipe and put up stoves. By evening our books were unpacked and we were quite cozy. Our landlord was a man who knew the whole countryside well, spoke Gaelic with more ease than English, and held intimate relations with the oldest inhabitants. He knew the Gaelic name of every field within two miles of his home, and the name of each hill, cliff, and mountain for many miles. In the Gaelic-speaking parts of Ireland, there is a system of naming any spot that needs to be distinguished from those around it.

Fitzgerald believed in fairies though at first he did not acknowledge it, at least explicitly, and in words. ' When I was a boy,' said he, ' nine men in ten believed in fairies and said so. Now, not more than one man in ten will say that he believes in them.' It was interesting to find a society with even 10 per cent of the members professed believers in fairies. Of the remaining 90 per cent a majority were believers without profession, timid believers, men who had not the courage of their convictions.

The people of any purely Gaelic district in Ireland, where the language is spoken yet, preserve numerous remnants of pre-Christian belief. These remnants are in many cases very valuable though they may seem grotesque, naive, and baseless to most observers. I found more Gaelic-speaking people in County Kerry than in any other county of Ireland ; especially were they numerous in the villages adjacent to Ventry harbor. From prehistoric times Ventry strand has been used for races. It was there that Fin Mac Cool and his men (mythologic characters) had races and games. Near the strand is the ' Field of Blood' where mythology says a ' world-shaking' battle was fought. Fitzgerald's house stood at the intersection of roads. Not far away was a chapel, and half a mile beyond was the cemetery. The position was a good one from which to observe the people of the district as they passed. Donkeys and their drivers amused me ; the donkeys were remarkably small, and their drivers were often re-

markably tall, strong men. I enjoyed watching the school children. At the school in that remote district, the supply of fuel was kept good by the children. Every morning each child carried to school a block of turf for the fire.

I saw a number of funeral processions pass. The procession, usually a long one, halted at the crossroad. The coffin, carried on men's shoulders, was put down on the middle of the crossing, and all the people knelt and prayed. The prayer finished, the procession moved on. This custom of kneeling at the crossroads is old ; so old that its meaning is unknown. At Ventry the members of an entire family in direct descent, and generally one removed (first cousins), are buried for generations in one small, stone chamber in the earth : one narrow grave contains them all. It may be said of a man buried thus that he is ' gathered to his fathers' in the strictest sense of the statement. His bones and those of his nearest kinsfolk are finally mingled in one mass. Rest, however, those bones have not, since they are brought to the upper earth whenever a new coffin arrives, for to this one belongs the lowest place in the stone chamber. At one burial I saw eight coffins taken out, as well as coffinless skulls and bones. The new coffin was placed at the bottom of the grave, then each coffin in its turn was lowered. The coffin that has been buried longest remains on top of all the others until it falls apart. Then, when the grave is opened for a new burial, the pieces of decayed wood are thrown out—the skull and whatever bones are left are placed on the last coffin and covered with earth.

February 20th came the worst storm that even old men could remember. When we woke in the morning, our windows were dark from snow that had drifted against them, and the wind was howling fiercely. Down in the 10x12 kitchen was the family horse. He had been found, in his little stall, trembling with cold. Snow had blown in around him till he stood knee-deep in it. He was led into the kitchen, hitched by the fire, and fed on the earth floor. Fitzgerald sat in my room most of that day. It was bright and warm and clean there ; the only comfortable place in his house. He confessed to me, and I afterward found that it was absolutely true, that he would not go out alone after dark ; he was afraid of fairies.

The day following the storm, there was a cattlefair at Dingle. People were passing from early morning. At fairs in County Kerry marriages are arranged. The parents of the prospective bride and groom go into a public house and, over a glass of beer or whiskey, tell what they will do for the couple and, if possible to agree, ' clinch the bargain.' At this particular fair, Fitzgerald's uncle and aunt were anxious to clinch a bargain for their daughter, mainly because she was determined to go to America. Fitzgerald tried to help them, but their efforts failed, greatly to the delight of the daughter.

The morning of the fair, a tinker came to me with a pitiful story. His wife was sick, and he had no money to buy medicine for her. I gave him the sum he asked for, and he started off. The next day he returned—the top was burned out of his cap, and his clothes were in rags. His appearance proved that Fitzgerald was right when he said the money I gave him would be spent for drink. This tinker, when twenty-five years of age, had married a beggar, the daughter of a beggar, and begun begging himself. In Ireland there are ' hereditary' beggars ; generation after generation of the same family beg for a livelihood. Poor people who have a roof over their heads are kind to these beggars ; kindness is a part of their religion. Fitzgerald said that in his father's house he had often at night seen beggars ' so thick on the kitchen floor that it was difficult to move around without treading on them.' When they ask in God's name for charity, it is seldom refused them.

February 26th was a perfect day. I hired a side-car and went to Smerwick harbor. The nearness of the harbor surprised me. From the top of a ridge, a short ride from Ventry strand, Smerwick, as well as Ventry harbor, was visible. Beyond Ventry harbor a range of hills adds to the beauty of the view. Smerwick harbor is made picturesque by long, narrow, rocky ridges

which extend into the water. Smerwick's most interesting point, considered historically, is Dun an Oir (Fort of Gold), the place where Spanish forces landed to assist the Irish against the English in Queen Elizabeth's time. The site of Dun an Oir is at the end of a small headland that projects into the harbor. The whole peninsula on which Mt. Brandon is situated is extremely interesting. I went first to Ballyferriter to call on the priest, for I thought he could tell me the names of old men in his parish who were likely to know Gaelic myths. I did not get much information, but he took me to a hill, not far from his house and pointing out picturesque views, said : ' On the west our nearest neighbors are the Americans ; from that promontory yonder to the North pole there is not, in a direct line, another foot of land. And around Smerwick we have the most interesting ruins in Ireland.'

After luncheon I went to Kilmalkedar to see the ruins of St. Brandon's church. In that churchyard are some of the oldest headstones in Ireland. Half a mile beyond Kilmalkedar there are three beehive cells. From the cells we drove to Gallerus, then walked across a field to the oratory of Gallerus. This oratory, though of unknown age, is nearly as perfect as on the day it was finished. Built of stone and roofed with the same material it is so firmly and symmetrically put together that it will stand for thousands of years if spared by men, lightning, and earthquake—a magnificent example of dry masonry.

Another day I went to Blasket island. When we came in sight of the ocean, fog obscured the islands. The path to the water led down a cliff, at least a hundred and twenty feet high, to a narrow cove dug out by the waves. The canvas boat that took us to the island was so light that two men picked it up and put it at the water's edge. At the island we entered a cove similar to the one on the mainland. A curious, busy scene was before us. Boatmen, their boats loaded with shells used for enriching land, had returned from the rocks where the shells were gathered. Girls and boys were helping the men pull the boats in, unload the shells, and put them in baskets. Men carried the baskets halfway up the steep, rocky bank. There they emptied them, and boys and girls loaded them again into baskets for donkeys to carry. Donkeys could not bring the baskets from the water's edge, the cliff was too precipitous. From the halfway place the shells were carried to the few potato fields on the island and scattered. An immense amount of labor for a few potatoes ! We climbed to the top of the cliff, and there was the village ; perhaps twenty straw-thatched cabins, the thatch held in place by a network of straw ropes fastened down with stones. In front of each cabin was a pile of manure. Cattle are kept in the cabin nights. Each morning the earth floor is cleaned by shoveling out the straw, but it is not taken far from the house. It accumulates all winter, and in the spring is carried to the potato fields. The schoolhouse is the best building on the island. It has windows, and the outside walls were whitewashed.

Kate, our faithful servant, found the cleanest house on the island and asked of its mistress the privilege of boiling a kettle of water to make tea. The wind blew so hard that a fire could not be built outside. She made the tea, but we could not sit inside to drink it ; the house was too dirty. I asked a man on crutches if he knew any Gaelic myths. His answer was : ' I care more about getting the price of a bottle of whiskey than about old stories.' Another man said : ' If you'll give me the price of a bottle of whiskey, I'll talk about stories.' I got no stories. Our return trip was not without danger. The boatmen had to row against a heavy wind. Each time that a wave came toward us it looked as if the boat would fill and sink, but it rose, went down, and up on another wave. Mrs. Curtin and Kate were seasick. Fitzgerald, pale from fear, repeated, time after time : ' God willing, this is my last trip in a canvas boat.' We were thankful when we reached the little cove in safety.

On the way to Ventry a woman came out of a cabin built against a sidehill and told us her story of woe. She and her husband had spent eight years in New York. They had prospered, but her husband's health failed, and they came back to Ireland. Now they were so poor that they often suffered for food. We went into her little windowless cabin. She stirred up the turf

fire, brought rope chairs, and asked us to sit down. In a corner near the fire a donkey was nibbling straw. While the woman talked to us, she sat on the earth floor with four of her children around her. In a pile of ashes on the hearth stood a starved yellow and white kitten, its fur burnt in patches. The woman, noticing that I looked at the kitten with pity, said : ‘ When we had a cow, the kitten had plenty of food, but now it won’t take even a sip of tea.’ Later in the day I went to see a man who was a hundred and one years of age. I thought possibly his mind was clear and he could tell me something of the old time, but he had lost grasp of mental things.

March 6th we rode around Sleahill. From the highest point the view of the ocean and the islands, the Blaskets and the Skelligs, is remarkably fine. On the way we passed through Conneenooles, one of the poorest hamlets in Ireland. It is at the edge of a rocky gulch on the side of a hill that slopes to the ocean. The cabins are old and in most cases windowless. To pass through the village the horse was taken from the side-car, and men drew the car down into the ravine and up on the opposite side. A crowd of ragged children gathered around to watch our progress. How the people who live in Conneenooles can get food enough to sustain life is a mystery.

One day, when riding through Rahinn, I stopped to photograph the great rock that a giant from Scotland threw over Fin Mac Cool’s house. Fin’s mother had told the giant that that was the way her son amused himself. A woman came near and seemed interested in our work. To be pleasant to her I asked if she liked to live in Rahinn. Her quaint answer amused us : ‘ I have to like it, for ’t is here I found the man.’ Among the men who knew Gaelic myths was Edward Sheehy. To tell me those myths he walked from Dunquin to Ventry strand, four miles. Sheehy was a hundred years old ; his hearing was perfect, and his eyesight good.

Toward the end of May, when I had obtained all the myths I could in County Kerry, we started for Dublin. The weather was perfect, hedges were green, and fields were white with daisies. We were glad to leave Ventry. Still I had accomplished work there impossible to do elsewhere. I had saved from extinction many Gaelic myths. It is not in homes of ease and wealth that ancient lore is found.

The migration of 1892 had begun. At every station we saw sad partings ; old men and women embracing and crying over their children and grandchildren who were going to America. Some of the young were kind and thoughtful of those whom they were leaving, others were indifferent and heedless. I thought : ‘ Soon life in America, with its manifold struggles and allurements, will absorb these young men and women ; few of these sad-faced old people will ever again see the dear ones from whom they are parting today.’ The thought caused me pain ; I felt the deepest sympathy for those agonized parents, who unable to shield their children, had to let them go out alone to buffet with the storms of the world. At a station near Limerick we witnessed a most pathetic scene. A woman, not less than eighty years old, was clinging to her grandchildren, or, perhaps, they were her great-grandchildren, a young man and woman, and was wailing as at a funeral. She realized that she was seeing them for the last time.

My first visit in Dublin was at the Irish academy where I was fortunate enough to meet two friends : Wakeman, the artist, and Count Plunkett. From the academy I went to Krumlin to call on Professor O’Looney, whom I found ill and discouraged. Much of the work he had planned was still undone, and he feared that life was nearing its end. After a few days in Dublin I started for a journey around the northwest coast of Ireland.

In Donegal we waited at McGinty’s hotel for the stage to Killybegs. For luncheon I ordered lamb chops and coffee. When served, the chops were so tough and the coffee so poor that I left them and went to the hotel opposite and ordered beefsteak. It was just ready to be

served when we heard the stage horn. There was no time for eating. The stage was a long, open side-car. Soon after starting rain began to fall. When we reached St. [Mt.] Charles, we were drenched, and I was afraid to continue the journey. We waited at McIntyre's hotel for better weather. From Killybegs I went to Carrick and then to Glen Columbkille to be there on the 9th of June when people from neighboring parishes assembled to pray at the stations of the holy well. Our baggage had increased to four large boxes and three heavy parcels, mainly books. I started the baggage off on a donkey-cart, we followed on a side-car. Soon a tempest of wind and rain came upon us and did not abate till Glen Columbkille was in sight. It was a troublesome ride ; with one hand I endeavored to keep the rugs around us. with the other to prevent the umbrella turning inside out. My mind was in turmoil, for I thought that my books and manuscript in the boxes on the donkey-cart would be ruined. The road was up-grade, and fast driving was impossible. There was neither house nor building of any kind wherein to take refuge.

On reaching the Glen we stopped at the principal house in the village. On the ground floor of the house there was a grocery just large enough to turn around in, a kitchen with earth floor, a ' best room,' 10x12, with a fireplace and cupboard, and off from that a tiny chamber with two beds in it. The 10x12 room was used as a storeroom for the grocery. Apparently the windows had never been opened or washed. The mistress of the house would rent this storeroom for five dollars a week. There was no choice. We must either take it or go back to Carrick. Ellen, a good strong Carrick girl, was with us. The windows were opened and the room aired ; the sacks of flour and meal disappeared, and soon a bright turf fire was blazing on the hearth. We had brought a hamper from Carrick with food enough for one day. When we found that there was no fresh meat to buy, we decided to live on bacon and eggs. The next morning Ellen came to us with a doleful face and complaining voice. How was she to fry eggs in a deep, iron kettle. She had fried the bacon in it but, if she put the eggs in, she couldn't get them out. We encouraged her to make the trial, which she did and succeeded in a way. Our landlady had kept house twenty years, and this iron kettle was the only cooking utensil she had—she baked, boiled, and brewed in it. She had reared four children and given them plenty to eat.

I met men from surrounding hamlets and obtained a few good myths. Then I returned to Carrick and resumed my journey. The first halt was at Ardara, the second at Glenties. The country we traveled through was, as our driver said, ' Wild enough.' It was hilly, rocky, and barren. Beyond Dunglow the earth is almost hidden under stones, boulders, and blocks of granite. I thought there could be no more inhospitable and unattractive place in the world, but I have since been in Montenegro. In such a region one would not expect to see a house, but there were houses here and there all the way, and between boulders were small patches of potatoes. I supposed that Gweedore was a town, but I saw only a large hotel with extensive grounds—a resort for English tourists.

From Gweedore there are many rocks and not a few bog fields, but the country is less desolate. When near Gortahork, we passed a cluster of six or seven thatched houses. It was Bedlam, where two or three years earlier several widely talked of evictions took place. When the poor people resisted, their houses were ' tossed,' torn down by the inhuman executors of English law. One of the houses is known as ' Donald's fort,' for Donald and his family fortified themselves inside and struggled against Fate, in the form of burly, ' hell bent' policemen and sheriffs, till the house was completely wrecked. The ruins of this hamlet are indisputable evidence of English brutality and oppression.

The village of Gortahork consisted of a church, the priest's house, the national school building, and the house and store of a Mr. Gallagher. When I asked for accommodations, I was told that there was a town three miles farther on, but when I explained that I was going to

Tory island and the village would be out of our way, Mr. Gallagher gave us rooms. After we were comfortably housed, I called on Father McFadden to whom I had a letter of introduction. Wishing to show us the country around Mt. Errigal, he proposed a ride and picnic for the following day. The next morning was bright and warm, and as soon as the Letterkenny mail was distributed, we started for the picnic. The priest and his sister with Father Kelly and Father Boyle met us at the crossroads. We drove to the base of Mt. Errigal, then east eight miles farther, and leaving our side-cars climbed the mountain till we found a spot level enough to answer for a table. While we were lunching, Father James McFadden, *the* McFadden, joined us. Love of country and hatred of injustice has caused this priest much suffering. He has been imprisoned for acting against the government during evictions and for encouraging his people to resist injustice and oppression.

Two days after the picnic, we went to Tory island. It was six o'clock when our little boat was pushed away from shore. For a time the wind was favorable, then it dropped, and the boat moved slowly though aided by 'goose wings' (a sail on each side). But at long last we came to land in front of the village on Tory. The island, two miles long and from a quarter to three quarters of a mile wide, is in a wild part of the Atlantic ocean, ten miles from the north-west corner of Ireland. During winter it is inaccessible for a month at a time ; in summer mail is carried over once a week. On the west side of the island there are stupendous granite cliffs. Gigantic rocks, apparently disconnected from the island, stand near it, defying the waves which pound against them unceasingly. The scene is one of wild grandeur. At the head of the island there is a magnificent cliff called Great Tor, or Castle of King Balor. Several myths are connected with this cliff.

The industry of the island is kelp. Along the east coast, which is low, waves bring in quantities of seaweed. When the seaweed is dry and ready for market, sailing vessels carry it to the mainland. After a storm every man, woman, and child is busy collecting this weed. The girls of Tory are fearless riders. They sit on the rump of a horse and ride at breakneck speed, their only hold the long reins of the bridle. When the horse is loaded with a basket of seaweed on each side, the girl kneels on the horse's rump, and, leaning over between the baskets, guides him with the bridle reins. It is a peculiar sight. The baskets are large, but the seaweed trails from them to the ground. To empty the basket, or kreel, as it is called, it is only necessary to draw out the bottom.

On the 4th of July there was a fierce wind and rainstorm. Stupendous whitecapped waves threatened to engulf the island ; many times they came within twenty feet of the village, then lost force and fell back. For several days after the storm, it was unsafe to go out in a small boat. While waiting for pleasant weather and a calm sea, I visited all the places mentioned in myth or story. I saw Great Tor when waves were struggling to hide it under spray. I saw the rock that so frightened the people by opening and swallowing a dog that was about to attack Columbkille that all, save one man and Columbkille, sprang into the sea and were drowned. In the churchyard there is a stone that kills whoever is foolhardy enough to meddle with it.

I went to 'The Place of the Holy Clay.' The story is told that in Columbkille's time six men and a woman were washed ashore on Tory. Columbkille buried them in one grave. The next morning he found the woman's body lying on the ground near the grave. He buried it again, and again it appeared. This happened for three consecutive mornings, then it was known to Columbkille that it was the body of a saint. He dug another grave and buried the body alone. Then he gave to Dugan, the only man left on the island, and to his descendants, forever, the right of raising dirt out of the grave when it was asked for in the name of God and Columbkille. I found the Dugan who now raises the dirt and asked him in the name of God and Columbkille to raise some for me. The old man knelt on the mound, prayed a few moments, then reached his arm down in a hole and drew up a handful of clay. He told me that a few particles of this clay if thrown into the sea would calm the waves.

July 9th the storm abated, and we left Tory. We were three hours in reaching mainland. At one time a heavy fog enveloped us, the wind blew furiously, and our boat was dangerously tossed by the waves. It was an anxious half hour not only for us but for the boatmen. When back to the newspaper world, we learned that the *City of Chicago*, the steamer we crossed the Atlantic on, had been wrecked on the rocks of Kinsale head.

Mr. Gallagher had found old men who knew Gaelic myths, so I did not leave Gortahork till the 25th of July. Four miles from Pettigoe, on an island in Lough Derg, is St. Patrick's Purgatory, a place annually visited by thousands of pilgrims. At the station in Pettigoe we encountered a throng of those people on the way to their homes. I saw no evidence that abstinence and prayer had resulted in spiritual profit. From Pettigoe I went to Galway. At Cavan there was a three-hour delay. The town seemed to be sleeping. In the middle of the main street two hens were brooding chickens. On reaching Galway I went to the Claddagh to see the men who had told me myths four years earlier. I found that the old man who related to me 'The Queen of Lonesome Island' was in the poorhouse ; his wife was dead.

The following day, in a miserable craft, called a steamer, we crossed to Aranmore (or Inishmore) . The other cabin passengers were a man and woman from San Francisco, California. Born in Ireland, they had returned to their country 'to get acquainted with it.' I spent several days on the island talking with the people and studying the ruins supposed to date back to 1500 B.C. Black fort is two miles from the village of Kilronan, and the road to it is mainly over a bed of limestone rocks. In places the rocks are flat and look as if laid down for a pavement ; again they are in steps or narrow broken slabs. Here and there on the limestone bed are huge, granite boulders undoubtedly left there during the glacial period, for aside from those boulders, there is no granite on the island. The fort is a gigantic wall made of heavy rocks and stretching across a promontory, the sides of which rise perpendicularly to a considerable height above the sea. In the narrow space enclosed by the wall are the remains of beehive houses.

The most remarkable ruin on the Aran islands, or in Europe, is Dun-Aengus, though Black fort antedates it by 1,500 years. Dun-Aengus was once a mighty fort. On the landside, at irregular distances apart, are three enormous walls. Beyond them are rows of sharp stones, also a defense. The space enclosed by the walls ends in a sea cliff 300 feet deep. Archeologically considered, these forts are of immense interest. There are many ruins on the islands; I visited them all and the numerous holy wells as well. I took down what myths the old people knew. One aged man, afflicted with palsy, told me a number of 'true stories of the old time.' In relating them he got so enthusiastic that he rapped on my knees or nudged me continually.

While we were on the island, a policeman fell in love with Ellen, a Carrick girl who was with us to cook when we found hotels impossible, and in Ireland they are impossible everywhere outside of large cities. He came, one evening, to ask me for her, saying that he must have ninety pounds dowry. At first I thought he had been drinking. When I discovered that he was sober and in earnest, and was proposing in the usual way, I referred him to the girl and her relatives. As Ellen was not in love with him, the affair ended quickly.

From Aranmore we went by steamer to Kilkieran Cama in Connemara. I left my wife and Ellen on the pier in the rain and mud and started to look for rooms ; there were a few white-washed houses in sight. With some trouble I secured two rooms, over the store and post office, in the house of a Mrs. Cook. I had been told that there were many Gaelic-speaking men in Connemara. I decided to stay a few weeks in Kilkieran and make a thorough search for myths. The first difficulty encountered was that of procuring food and drink. I sent to Galway for bacon and canned Australian mutton, to Cork for coffee, and to Russia for tea. Fresh meat was rarely for sale in Kilkieran. I was at work on *Pan Michael*, and every hour

not occupied in obtaining myths was spent in translating. A rainy day, or a day when a story-teller failed to come, I translated from forty to forty-six pages. Beginning with August 30th, it rained for three consecutive days. I translated fifty-two pages each day. Then I undertook to finish the translation in four days, fifty-four pages each day, and I succeeded.

With September came clouds and wind. It was almost impossible to keep warm. We filled the cracks around the windows with cloth, but it was not so easy to fill cracks in the walls and floor. Turf burns quickly and does not give out much heat.

I found in Kilkieran several persons with whom it was a pleasure to speak Gaelic. A young man, by the name of Kneigh, had a remarkably fine accent and a pleasant voice. I employed him to talk with me evenings. Colman Goram knew many Gaelic myths. I took them all down. He was a ragged, dirty man with a large, red lump on his forehead. He was old but he had a good memory, and in childhood had been taught not from books, but from the lips of his grandfather. Goram and my landlady were enemies of long standing, and more than once I had to rescue him from the brutality of her son or her servant.

There were many sad cases of poverty around Kilkieran Carna. Half a mile beyond Mrs. Cook's in a windowless hut, 8x10, I found, sitting on the earth floor, a woman eighty-six years of age. Her niece, who was 'not so smart as another,' was incapable of working for wages. She did odd jobs here and there and got a bite for herself and her aunt to eat. I befriended the poor old creature, gave her food and money, but I could not induce her to leave the hut. It was her home.

Only on Nov. 11th [1892] did I learn that Cleveland had been elected. The newspapers of Ireland seemed to have gone asleep for the ages. Christmas found us still in Kilkieran Carna. We had spent a year in Ireland. Before daylight Jan. 10th we started for County Kerry, going to Galway by side-car. When near the hills called Twelve Pins, we encountered snow and a cold wind. At Mamcross we stopped at Peacock's, the public house. I went in and meeting no one went from dirty room to dirtier room till I reached the kitchen. There I found a woman washing clothes. My wife and Ellen came, and around a turf fire we succeeded in getting warm. Resuming our journey we did not halt again till we came to the picturesque village of Oughterard. When within six miles of Galway, the horse broke down. He was not strong enough for a journey of forty miles. Martin, the driver, was a brute. In spite of all I could say, he kept up a constant urging and whipping. I remonstrated and threatened, but words were lost on the wretch. I thought, as Ellen said, that Galway would never be in it. But at seven o'clock in the evening we were sitting by a cozy fire in a room in the Railroad hotel. The next morning, at a bookstore kept by a maiden lady, 'not for profit, but with the hope of doing good,' I bought an old edition of Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress*.

By a slow train we traveled to Limerick and then to Cork. In a bookstore in Cork I found a copy of the Isle of Man bible in the original language of the people—a language similar to Irish—a book out of print. I was wonderfully glad to find and secure such a treasure. From Cork we went to Killorglin, by railroad. The stationmaster at Killorglin amused us greatly. He was very inquisitive, and I indulged him. After each answer he exclaimed: 'Well, well! Are you Americans?'

'We are.'

'Well, well! From New York?'

'No'

'Well, well! From Springfield then?'

'No.'

'Well, well!'

'I am from Washington.'

‘ Well, well ! Like Ireland ?’  
‘ Yes.’  
‘ Well, well! ’”

And so it would have gone on indefinitely, but the side-car for Cahirciveen arrived, and we were off. It was an interesting ride around bluffs and across rocky places. Again I had a driver who was a bitter enemy of a hotel proprietor, and arriving at Cahirciveen he took me to a place where he said I could get good accommodations. One glance was enough. Only when I refused to stop there, did he point out Fitzgerald’s hotel.

The hotel was noisy, and the food bad. Thinking it possible to find rooms I called on Canon Brusnahan, whom I had met in Dublin, and asked his advice. He put on his tall hat and cloak and went with me. With such a guide everyone was anxious to do the best he could. I found rooms in the house of Mr. Brennan, and with Ellen for cook, we were soon comfortably established. The canon was interested in mythology and he sent for old men who knew myths. I took down many that were worthless but with the worthless I got a few valuable ones. About this time I received a present from Pobêdonostsev, procurator of the holy synod, a beautiful volume of Pushkin.

I spent eight months in Cahirciveen, studying the people, collecting myths and beliefs, which are survivals of Druidism or of a more remote period. I translated many of Sienkiewicz’ short stories and took up a number of East Indian languages. The people of Cahirciveen interested me, for the greater number of them believed in witches and fairies. Those who were most sincere in this belief were devout Christians. A young woman who had been educated in a convent told us as a great secret, that the daughter of a woman who lived near her father’s house was a witch. By her magic she stole butter from the farmers ; she drew all the richness of the milk from their cows to her own churn.

Our landlady was so devout that she spent several hours of each day in prayer. I asked her if she believed in fairies. She said : ‘ I think they may be fallen angels, for it is known that there are some in the world, and that they would have destroyed the world long ago were it not that they hope that on judgment day they will get back to Heaven. It is possible that these angels have been confounded with fairies.’ One day I called at the house of an old man who had told me good myths. By the fireplace sat his daughter ; she was perfectly helpless. Her father said : ‘ It is not the maid that is here at all, but an old fairy in her place.’ He sincerely believed this.

The evening preceding Ash Wednesday, all the boys and girls from eight to fifteen years of age were out with ropes to lasso any girl of marriageable age whom they could find. If they caught one, they tried to drag her to the river and throw her in, because the time had expired and she was not married. There was a rescue and much sport. On Ash Wednesday crowds of people went to Canon Brusnahan’s church ‘ to be marked,’ have a black cross made on the forehead. The Seneca Indians when going out with a child, after dark, mark the child’s forehead with a coal, ‘ to keep evil spirits away.’

During the month preceding Lent there were many marriages and naturally much gossip. I found that it was not unusual for a couple to marry without being acquainted with each other ; or what is worse, hating each other and loving someone else. Tuesday, just before the time for being married expired, a woman who had five children married a boy of twenty. There was great excitement in the village. The bridegroom’s mother was frantic with rage ; the bride’s grownup son gave his mother a sound beating. No one interfered, for the sentiment of the people was, ‘ Well does she deserve it.’ I asked a man on the street if the young husband had money ; his answer amused me : ‘ Devil a bit, but to work around like another.’ My favorite walk while in Cahirciveen was to Carhen house, the birthplace of

Daniel O'Connell near the beautiful little river of Carhir. In June I went to Ballinskellig where I met two pleasant men : Mr. Abbot of Dublin, who entertained me with his queer ideas about Gaelic mythology ; and Mr. Cuthburt, who assisted me in getting fine views. Early in September I visited Derrynane, and was entertained by the grandson of Daniel O'Connell, in the house where the great liberator lived and died.

We left Cahircivcen Sept. 12th 1893. The morning was glorious ! As we rode along the inlet, the reflections in the water were wonderfully fine : hills, hedges, and houses were there as distinct as on land. This was the last stage trip from Cahircivcen to Killorglin. That day the first train went over the rails that had been laid between the two towns. The country was at its best, and the journey to Dublin was very agreeable. A few days later we crossed the Irish sea, and the next morning, before the great city had wakened, we were in London. I spent three very pleasant weeks in the city. I had many things to look up in the British museum and I had old friends to meet, among others Patrick Collins, then consul general, and Sir Thomas Esmonde.

September 30th we went to Edinburgh. I found it a beautiful city. It was not the modern part, however, which interested me. I stopped at the Edinburgh hotel in the new town but from morning till evening I roamed around in the old town. While we were in Edinburgh, the Duke of York and his bride visited the city. The illumination and decorations were fine. The city seems planned for just such a display. From the old town the new with its banners, flags, welcomes, arches, and myriad of lights was like a gorgeous dream ; from the new town the old was equally beautiful and brilliant. The local party arrived in the evening. A vast number of people had assembled to welcome the heir to the throne. The roar from a multitude of voices in ordinary conversation was a sound to be long remembered.

A few days later I spent several pleasant hours with Professor Blaekie and his wife, persons who inspire a man with the feeling that he is better for having known them. I was sorry to say good-bye ; they were old and feeble, and I knew that I should not see them again. Among the pleasant people whom I met in Edinburgh was Professor Kennan. I had a letter of introduction to him from the secretary of state for Scotland ; with him I examined the Gaelic manuscripts kept in Advocates library. Sunday I tried to attend evening services in St. Giles's ; finding not even standing room in the great edifice I went to a near-by church where there were not more than a hundred and fifty worshipers.

From Edinburgh we journeyed to the historic old town of Stirling and then to Oban. The scenery in the highlands is nowhere grand, but it is everywhere beautiful ; and at no season of the year is it quite as beautiful as when autumn foliage is in its glory. One day, while I was looking at a volume of myths in an Oban bookstore, a man came in who I thought was a minister. Noticing the book I held in my hand, he came to me and said : ' That is an expensive book. It should have been gotten up cheaper. I collected those myths.'

' Oh,' said I, ' then you are Mr. McDougall, and I have a letter to you from Professor McKennon.' [Kennan ?]

After reading the letter, McDougall showed considerable uneasiness. He seemed to fear that I had come to Scotland to carry away material which belonged by right to him. When I said that I had read his book and thought it the best collection of Scotch myths that had been made, he grew more talkative. And later, when we met on a Loch Linnhe steamer, he was cordial, and I enjoyed his society, for he fully appreciated the value of mythology.

Loch Linnhe, the hills and glens along its banks gorgeous with autumn tints, was wonderfully beautiful. I had decided to spend two or three months in Fort William. I wished to study Scotch Gaelic and I thought that in that small town in the highlands there would be men who

still spoke the language. Not finding suitable rooms at the hotel, I sought and found them in a private house overlooking Loch Linnhe. Just across the loch, in full view from our windows, was Corpach. There was a great deal of fog and rain at that season of the year but, when the sun came from behind clouds, I delighted in watching the dense fog which had hidden Corpach, by degrees lose its density, grow transparent, and float away.

As soon as we were comfortably settled. I began to study Scotch Gaelic and to hunt for old men to tell me stories. Sundays I attended the Free church, for the service was in Gaelic. Oct. 26th Ben Nevis was white with snow. I hired a carriage and went to Spean Bridge to get a good view of the highest of Great Britain's mountains. A mountain whose imposing appearance is wholly due to its isolation, for it is only 4,406 feet above sea level. The view was fine : in the background a snow mountain, at the base evergreen trees, and in the foreground crofters' cottages. At the inn I met Father McDougal, the priest at Lochaber, a kindly, vivacious little man. I went with him to a crofter's cottage to talk with the owner who he thought knew Gaelic myths. The old man was sitting in a wheel chair, knitting a stocking ; his mind was clear, but the myths he knew were of no value. Near the ruins of Inverlochy castle I met a little blue-eyed boy and I asked his name. ' Don Cameron, Sir,' was his answer. It amused me, for it recalled our senator, Don Cameron. The name, however, is one of constant recurrence in and around Fort William where there are many Camerons, and the Christian name is usually either Don or Angus.

Nov. 2nd was a typical highland winter day. The sun shone out bright and clear for a few minutes, then came a storm of wind which bent trees and rattled windows. On the loch waves rolled high, and sea gulls cawed ; then again Corpach gleamed in sunshine, and the town and the snow-capped hills were pictured in the placid lake. For a few minutes the picture was perfect, then a drifting storm cloud neared the sun. Shadows began to creep along the hills, and soon deep gloom settled over the landscape; and again came wind and rain. The effects of sunshine and cloud were fascinating ; I did very little writing that day.

Thanksgiving day snow clouds came and went on the hills across the loch. At one moment a heavy storm seemed to be approaching, then on a sudden it drew back, sped to the hillside, to the mountains beyond ; again the landscape was hidden by fog, and the mountains were only a shade darker than the water and sky. Twice that day I attended service at the Free church to listen to Gaelic. For two months I had spent an hour and a half each morning with McIntosh, the Free church minister, reading Gaelic. He was a helpful man and he was anxious that I should have a correct pronunciation of Scotch Gaelic. The leading physician was also a helpful man and he was a willing loaner of books. Following our usual routine, when no social duty intervened, Mrs. C. read aloud several hours each evening. When the books we brought with us were exhausted. I borrowed from Dr. Miller.

Memoirs of Jeremiah Curtin

Author : Jeremiah Curtin

Keywords : Linguist ; Ethnology ; Folklore ; Linguist ; Library of Congress

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