

Cunnemara.

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

Henry David Inglis

1834

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Journey through Cunnemara—Ouchterard, and Loch Corrib—Mr. Martin's Gate-house—Inland Navigation—Condition of the People—from Ouchterard to Ma'aun—Chain of Lakes—Cabins, and deceptive Appearances—Scenery—Heath—Ma'am, and its neighbourhood—A Surprise—State of the Mountaineers—Ascent of the Mountains—A Visit to a Pattern—Scenery and Pictures—Sketch of what a Pattern is—A Fight, and its Result—A few words on Irish Fighting—Excursion to Cong, and Loch Mask.

I was now about to leave for awhile the more civilized part of Ireland behind me ; and to travel through Cunnemara and Joyce's country, those districts which are the least visited ; but of whose natural attractions, I had heard all that could render the anticipation of my journey agreeable. And I resolved now for a little while to disencumber myself of all those things which, from experience, I know to be drawbacks upon the enjoyment of a journey like this ; and which impede the free exercise of a man's will,—be they carriage, or horse, or baggage, or any thing that, when a man wishes to do this or that, forces his attention, and claims to be considered. With only such incumbrance then as may suit a pedestrian, I took the road to Ouchterard.

There is nothing very inviting to the traveller, in leaving Galway. I found a flat uninteresting country on all sides, and the first view which one obtains of Loch Corrib does not impress one with very high notions of its beauty. It was a coldish blowy day, however, when nothing looks well ; and as Loch Corrib, at least the lower part of it, is not in Cannemara, and as, besides, I had never heard any very high character of it, I was not disappointed. The upper part of Loch Corrib, however, is greatly superior to the lower part ; though nowhere on its banks can the scenery be said to be striking, or fine.

Five or six miles from Galway, I found myself leaving the flat country, and getting amongst hills ; low indeed, and with no character but that of bleakness. These hills extend on the left, as far as the sea bays, and are entirely uncultivated and uninhabited, unless at particular seasons, when cattle from the lower grounds are sent there to graze, under the charge of herds, who make their temporary homes among the hills.

After an agreeable, though not a highly interesting walk, I reached Ouchterard early in the afternoon, and there had the first experience of a Cunnemara inn ; though indeed Ouchterard is not properly in Cunnemara, but only on the confines of it. The inn was much the same as may be met with in the remoter parts of Scotland, where ham and eggs, oat cake, butter, and whiskey, form the staple of one's dinner. At Ouchterard, however, as in many other parts of Ireland, I was indebted more to private hospitality than to the inn larder.

The situation of Ouchterard is agreeable. It is a straggling little village, part of it straggling as far as the loch ; and with one of the prettiest and most limpid streams in the world dancing through it. Just above the village, there is a succession of very pretty rapids, almost cascades;

and on a beautiful green bank, at the foot of them, stands a pretty cottage, the property of Mr. Martin of Galway, as he and his predecessors have long been generally called. This house, Mr. Martin calls his gate-house ; and it is not inaptly named ; for the road from this spot passes, with very little interruption, through his estate, to his house at Ballinahinch—a distance of twenty-six Irish miles. The parish of Ouchterard is thirty-three miles long, and nearly fourteen broad, and contains about 9000 inhabitants, of whom from thirty to forty are Protestants.

The banks of Loch Corrib, at Ouchterard, are cultivated, pretty well wooded, but rather tame and uninteresting. The lake, however, is a noble expanse of water, and cannot be even glanced at on a map, without awakening reflections as to the important results which may be anticipated from its proposed connexion with the bay of Galway, as a means of improving the vast tract of country adjoining its banks. The lough extends over a surface of no less than 30,000 acres ; it embraces a coast of fifty miles in extent ; it is only thirteen feet above the level of Galway bay ; and contains islands, whose superficies is a thousand acres.

The people in the immediate neighbourhood of Ouchterard are poorly circumstanced. Most of them are very small holders of land, not taken by the acre, but in the lump ; and for which they pay from 4*l.* to 8*l.* rent ; and grow on it potatoes and oats. Those who are able to keep cows are comparatively comfortable ; but it is not until we penetrate further into Cunnemara, that cows are pretty universally kept. Many persons were so miserably off when I visited Ouchterard, that the parish priest had been obliged to become security for the price of a little meal, to prevent them from starving. I have already mentioned the distressed condition of the landlords, as one cause of the poor condition of the lower orders : but I ought to have added, that in very many cases, landlords have no power of being kind or otherwise, and no control over their own property, the management of which is vested in persons acting under legal authority. Such individuals must have rents ; crops are seized, cows driven, and all the results of improvidence amongst the upper classes are visited upon every link in the chain of agriculturists.

The quantity of bog-land about Ouchterard is considerable ; but there are great facilities for its improvement. I saw excellent crops of oats, the second year of cultivation only, in the midst of bog-land.

In the little river which runs through Ouchterard, pearls are found. I saw some very beautiful specimens,—some as large as peas, and with a slightly pink tint.

The direct road through Cunnemara runs along the chain of small lochs, of which Loch Uril is one, to Ballinahinch and Clifden, skirting the Mamturk range, and the Twelve Pins of Bunarola. Before taking this line, however, I was desirous of seeing that part of Cunnemara which borders on Joyce's country north of the Mamturk mountains, and at the extreme head of Loch Corrib :—with this intention I left Ouchterard. The road which I took is the same, for seven or eight miles, as the Clifden line. At first, it is not highly interesting, but merely wild. I journeyed up the bank of the little stream which runs through Ouchterard, and skirted several small lakes into which it expands ; and then found myself approaching mountain scenery. I was now in Cunnemara : with me, mountain regions and buoyant spirits are synonymous, saw at a glance, from the character and forms of the mountains before me, that my expectations were to be realized ; and I pressed forward to the enjoyment of the banquet. My progress, however, received a slight check. It had been lowering all the morning ; mists had been gradually rising from the valleys ; and when less than half-way on my journey, I was overtaken by one of the most tremendous torrents that ever descended on mountain regions. I found shelter, however, in a cabin near to the road ; and had an opportunity of

making some few inquiries. Judging from the interior comforts of the cabin, I should have concluded that its inmates were miserably poor ; but they were not so wretched as they appeared to be. They paid fifty shillings for as much land as fed ten sheep and two cows ; and they grew a little oats, and some potatoes besides.

I shall have many other opportunities of remarking the more favourable circumstances in which the mountain land occupiers are placed, than those holding small portions of land in the more fertile districts. At present, however, I shall pursue my journey.

The rain having ceased, I left the cabin, and proceeded on my way. For a mile or two farther, the road continued in the same direction, still skirting a succession of little lakes, most of which were fringed with the beautiful white waterlily, reclining on its broad leaf : and now I diverged from the Clifden road, and struck directly to the right towards the mountains. The scenery here is extremely wild and solitary ; there is no attempt at cultivation, and no habitation of any kind : I had not even a stream for a companion. Two old grey crows, however, hopped from rock to rock along with me by the road-side.

A second tremendous fall of rain again sent me to a shelter,—not a house but a projecting rock,—which fortunately stood near to the road, and which had a roof and two side walls—more than many cabins have. Not a drop of rain reached me here ; and the beautiful heath which bloomed around me, and at my feet, served to beguile the time. I never saw in any part of Britain such heath as I gathered here. I could compare it only with the heath I have gathered in the province of Valencia, or on the coast of Sardinia.

Lighter drops and a sudden gleam of sunshine sent me from my shelter. Another mile of ascent brought me within sight of my destination—a single house far below in the hollow of the hills ; and opened a very striking view of a mountain amphitheatre ; and soon after, I reached Ma'am ; or, as the inn-keeper has christened the house, “ Corrib-Head Hotel.”

The scenery of Ma'am is fine, very fine. If a lake filled the hollow of the mountains, Killarney might tremble for its supremacy ; for the outline of the mountain range surpasses in picturesque form any of the ranges that bound the lakes of Killarney. At Ma'am, one is forcibly struck with the advantages which would be opened up to this district, by the extension of the navigation of Loch Corrib to the sea. Fine slopes of reclaimable land border the deep stream that, at the distance of half a mile, flows into Loch Corrib : and the same boats that would carry to market the produce of the cultivated land would bring from the bay of Galway sand, sea-weed, and lime, to be laid upon the yet unimproved wastes.

I made Ma'am my head-quarters for several days ; and had every reason to be pleased with the spot. The inn is of rare excellence. The first day I arrived, a dinner was placed on the table, at a couple of hours notice,—of roast kid milk-fed, veal pie, apple pie, and abundance of concomitants.

In the course of my excursions in the neighbouring country. I chanced to join company with a man who was sauntering on the road, without stockings or shoes, and clothed in tatters. I walked along with him, and he invited me into his house, to take a drink of milk. To look at the man, one might well have doubted if he owned a house at all ; and to say the truth, the house was about as miserable a hovel as I ever entered : and yet, will it be credited ? this man paid 30*l.* of rent; and held sufficient land to feed sixty sheep, twelve black cattle, four cows, and several horses, and had about five acres besides, under tillage ! This man possessed the means of living in perfect comfort ; he had certainly a fair bargain of his land ; but he was an uncivilized being : and had no more ideas of comfort, or of the usages of civilized people, than any other savage.

I should certainly say, that the peasantry of this mountainous district have the means of being comfortable : land is not generally high let ; cows are universally kept ; fish attainable for the trouble of taking them ; and the grazings of the mountain parts of the farms are let to cattle dealers in Galway, and elsewhere, who pay 1s. a month, for cattle, per head, and 3*d.* for sheep. Generally speaking, there is a disposition to overstock farms ; and it frequently happens, that a farmer does not raise even enough of potatoes for his consumption, although he has a sufficiency of good land. Here, as elsewhere, there are some very small holders of land under the farmers ; and these are poor enough ! The day after I reached Ma'am, I climbed, not Mamturk mountain, but the mountain adjoining to it, and little inferior in elevation. It was an interesting walk : I found the hills covered with the strongly odoriferous bog myrtle ; and with many beautiful varieties of heath, among which I found some specimens of the purest white. The ascent was not difficult ; and the view was extensive and interesting. The greater part of Cunnemara and Joyce's country was laid open : in one direction the sea line was visible ; Loch Corrib and Loch Mask were on the opposite horizon ; and in every other direction the mountain ranges of the immediate district, as well as of the more distant county of Mayo, occupied the picture. I found on the mountain land—which but a few years before was bog—excellent crops of oats and barley, the oats growing very high up the mountain side. I looked into a farm-house, on my return, where a substantial farmer lived. He paid 80*l.* of rent; and owned 700 sheep and 200 head of black cattle.

I had frequently, since coming to Ireland, heard of a *pattern* being held, and had been asked if I had seen a pattern ? It fortunately happened, that on the second day of my sojourn at Ma'am, a very celebrated pattern was to be held, on a singular spot, high up amongst the mountains, on a little plain, on the top of the pass between Mamturk and the neighbouring mountain,—an elevation of about 1200 feet ;—and I, of course, resolved to be present. A pattern was, originally, a religious ceremony, and was, and still is, always celebrated near to a holy well : but although some still frequent the pattern for devotional purposes, it is now resorted to chiefly as a place of recreation, where, after the better disposed have partaken of the innocent amusements of dancing and moderate hilarity, drunkenness and fighting wind up the entertainment.

I was accompanied, in my excursion, by the innkeeper ; and the road being rather toilsome, I was accommodated with a horse. This, however, was a luxury which I was soon obliged to disencumber myself of ; for a great part, or rather, by far the greater part, of the road being through bogs, I soon found the horse to be a dangerous companion, and was glad to leave him behind, at a cabin door, and make my way through the bog on foot. It requires some practice to be an expert bog-trotter ; to know where one may safely rest one's weight ; where one must skip lightly from tuft to tuft ; and where one must not risk an advance at all. I had had some experience of bogs before coming to Ireland, and proved so apt a learner in bog-trotting, that, during the whole of my journey, I never committed so great an error of judgment as to sink even knee-deep.

The ascent to the spot where the pattern was to be held was picturesque in the extreme. Far up the winding way, for miles before us, and for miles behind too. groups were seen moving up the mountain side,—the women, with their red petticoats, easily distinguishable : some were on foot, some few on horseback, and some rode double. About half-way up we overtook a party of lads and lasses, beguiling the toil of the ascent by the help of a piper, who marched before, and whose stirring strains every now and then prompted an advance in jig-time up the steep mountain-path. Some few we met coming away,—sober people, who had performed their *station* at the holy well, and had no desire to be partakers in the sort of amusement that generally follows.

Everybody in this part of the country is called Joyce ; and the spot where the pattern is held is claimed by the Joyces to be in Joyce's country : but this is not admitted by the Cunnemara boys ; and accordingly, two factions,—the Joyces and their opponents,—usually hold patterns near the same ground, though not close together ; but yet so near as to make it impossible that the meetings should break up without a *scrimmage*. The Joyces are a magnificent race of men ; the biggest, and stoutest, and tallest, I have seen in Ireland ; eclipsing even the peasantry of the Tyrol ; and I believe, indeed, their claims on this head are universallv admitted. I shall by and by have an opportunity of introducing the reader to *big Jack Joyce*, when I visit him in his own house.

When I reached the summit of the Pass, and came in sight of the ground, it was about four in the afternoon, and the pattern was at its height : and truly, in this wild mountain spot, the scene was most striking and picturesque. There were a score tents or more,—some open at the sides, and some closed ; hundreds in groups were seated on the grass, or on the stones, which lie abundantly there. Some old persons were yet on their knees, beside the holy well, performing their devotions ; and here and there apart, and half-screened by the masses of rocks which lay about, girls of the better order, who had finished their pastimes, were putting off their shoes and stockings to trot homeward ; or were arranging their dress ; or perhaps,—though more rarely,—exchanging a word or two with a Joyce, or a Cunnemara boy. All was quiet when I reached the ground ; and I was warmly welcomed as a stranger, by many who invited me into their tents. Of course I accepted the invitation ; and the pure potheen circulated freely.

By and by, however, some boastful expression of a Joyce appeared to give offence to several at the far end of the tent ; and something loud and contemptuous was spoken of by two or three in a breath. The language, which, in compliment to me had been English, suddenly changed to Irish. Two or three glasses of potheen were quickly gulped by most of the boys ; and the innkeeper who had accompanied me, and who sat by me, whispered that there would soon be some fighting. I had seen abundance of fighting on a small scale, in Ireland ; but, I confess, I had been barbarous enough to wish I might see a regular faction fight : and now I was likely to be gratified. Taking the hint of the innkeeper, I shook hands with the “ boys” nearest to me, right and left ; and taking advantage of a sudden burst of voices, I stepped over my bench, and, retiring from my tent, took up a safe position on some neighbouring rocks.

I had not long to wait : out sallied the Joyces and a score of other “ boys” from several tents at once, as if there had been some preconcerted signal ; and the flourishing of shillelahs did not long precede the using of them. Any one, to see an Irish fight, for the first time, would conclude that a score or two must inevitably be put *hors de combat*. The very flourish of a regular shillelah, and the shout that accompanies it, seems to be the immediate precursors of a fractured skull ; but the affair, though bad enough, is not so fatal as it appears to be : the shillelahs, no doubt, do sometimes descend upon a head, which is forthwith a broken head ; but they oftener descend upon each other: and the fight soon becomes one of personal strength. The parties close and grapple ; and the most powerful man throws his adversary : fair play is but little attended to : two or three often attack a single man ; nor is there a cessation of blows, even when a man is on the ground. On the present occasion, five or six were disabled : but there was no homicide ; and after a *scrimmage*, which lasted perhaps ten minutes, the Joyces remained masters of the field. The women took no part in the fight ; but they are not always so backward : it is chiefly, however, when stones are the weapons, that women take a part by supplying the combatants with missiles. When the fight ended, there were not many remaining, excepting those who were still in the tents, and who chanced to be

of neither faction. Most of the women had left the place when the quarrel began, and some of the men too. I noticed, after the fight, that some, who had been opposed to each other, shook hands and kissed ; and appeared as good friends as before. The sun was nearly set, when the pattern finally broke up ; and, with the bright sun flaming down the defile, and gilding all the slopes, the scene was even more striking now than when we ascended. The long line of pedestrians and horses stretched many miles down the lengthened defile ; and the mountain notes of the pipe, and the occasional burst of voices, and the lowing of the cattle, roused by these unwonted sounds, filled all the hollow of the hills. It was quite dark when we reached Ma'am.

Before proceeding on my journey, I made an excursion from Ma'am to Cong, and to the foot of Loch Mask. I went on horseback ; and as I did not find the journey highly interesting, I will not detail the particulars of it. The road skirts Loch Corrib all the way to Cong, but does not conduct the traveller through any very striking scenery. The banks are scarcely elevated enough to be bold ; and are not cultivated enough to be beautiful. Some caves are shown in the neighbourhood of Cong ; but they do not possess any high interest. The distance from Cong to Ross-hill, and to the shore of Loch Mask, is about four miles : and Ross-hill is worth a visit. Loch Mask is not striking ; the banks are not generally very elevated, and are deficient in picturesque beauty.

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Journey from Ma'am to Roundstone and Clifden—Capiabilities of Cunnemara—The Waste Lands of Ireland— A Storm, and its consequences—A Cunnemara Potheen-house—Merry-making— Charming Scenery—Derry Clare— Ben-Gowr and Lettery—Loch Ina—Herds of Cattle and Troops of Horses—Ballinahiuch—A Solitary Burying-ground—Roundstone— Reclaimed Bog—Rotation of Crops—Manure—Facilities offered for the extension of Cultivation—The Landlords of Cunnemar— Urrisbeg—Singular Prospect—Wild Flowers—The King's Writ

I INTENDED to have left Ma'am, to proceed on my journey through Cunnemara, early the next morning ; but the weather was so threatening, that I delayed till after mid-day. In order to gain the road to Clifden, it was necessary to return to the point at which I left it, in going to Ma'am. I then turned to the westward, and pursued my journey. The road still lay along that chain of small lakes which extends all the way from Ouchterard, almost the whole length of Cunnemara ; and it was impossible to cast the eye over the vast inclined plains of bog-land, skirted by fine water levels, which seemed to invite draining, without feeling a conviction of the immense capabilities of this part of Ireland ; and seeing, in prospective, these vast tracts bearing abundant produce,—and the chains of lochs carrying that produce,—on the one side, to Loch Corrib and Galway bay ; and, on the other, to Birterbuy bay, or one of the other bays which lie to the westward. Some improvements are at present in progress by a gentleman who holds land under Mr. St. George, one of the proprietors of Cunnemara : but I believe there are certain obstacles in the way of success. I question whether much ever will or can be done, in cultivating the waste reclaimable lands of Ireland, by the proprietors themselves. Capital and enterprise are alike wanting. This, however, it is—the cultivation of the re-claimable wastes, that can alone provide permanent employment for the people, and effect a real change in their condition. To cultivate lands where the produce cannot be taken cheap to market, would of course be the act of an insane person ; but if government were to provide, in the first place, for the transmission of produce, by the construction of roads, wherever wanted, and of canals, or river navigation, wherever practicable (by which employment would be found for the people, and poverty and idleness, the great feeders of agitation, in part

removed), we are entitled to believe, that capital would flow in the direction where it would be wanted, and where a certain return would await its employment.

When I left Ma'am, I anticipated a fine afternoon ; but I was mistaken in my judgment. The mountains became gradually obscured ; the mists began to rise from the defiles and ravines ; and I quickened my pace, to reach a house called *Flynn's*, or the half-way,—the only house, I think, that presents itself in a distance of about twelve miles. Shortly before reaching this resting-place, I passed a fine lake on the right, adorned with wooded islands. It is singular, that throughout the greater part of Cunnemara, the only wood that is to be found is on the islands in the lakes. The rain had begun some time ago ; and it came down in such torrents, that long before reaching the half-way house, I was thoroughly drenched. My port-manteau I had sent from Ma'am, to await my arrival some days afterwards at a spot called *Jack Joyce's* ; but I had hired a ragged lad to carry all that was necessary for a drenched man ; and I was soon in a condition to pay my respects to the inmates in the kitchen,—which was also fain to serve as a parlour. I found the kitchen full, and abundance of merriment going forward. There was a piper and a fiddler, both of whom had been at the pattern ; there were Joyces and Flynn's—men and women—boys and girls ; and here I saw by far the finest specimen of an Irish girl I had yet seen in Ireland. She was a magnificent creature, the daughter of the hostess, with a fine, expressive, and somewhat aristocratic face, and a form of perfect symmetry : her sweetheart was there—a Joyce, only seventeen years of age, but six feet three inches in height, and weighing upwards of sixteen stone : the girl was eighteen : but the match was not perfectly approved of, he being a Joyce, and she a Flynn ; the Joyces and the Flynn's being not entirely as one.

The rain continuing to come down in torrents, it was out of the question to continue my journey ; and therefore all I had to do, was to make myself as agreeable to the company as possible. It is no difficult task to become a sudden favourite with the lower classes in Ireland : there is always a disposition to look favourably on a stranger ; and if that stranger lays aside all pretensions,—is familiar with those whom he meets, and accommodates himself to circumstances,—he is sure to be treated, not merely with civility, but with respect, and even affection. Dancing was the great amusement of the evening : and excellent dancers some of the party were. I was not a novice in the mysteries of the jig ; and did not decline the invitation of the hostess, and her beautiful daughter. The more vigorously I danced, the greater was my popularity ; and at the conclusion of every turn, “ Long life to your honour !” was the universal exclamation. Nor was it possible to decline a little potheen ; though this I took in greater moderation than the dancing. I don't know where all the household and visitors got beds : I saw no bed-room, excepting the one I occupied ; and I would, very willingly, that it had been occupied by anybody but myself. To have looked for a clean bed here would have been ridiculous.

At an early hour next morning, I left the half-way house, particularly favoured by the weather. The country now became, every mile of the way, more interesting. The chain of lakes still continued on the left ; and the mountain views on the right became bolder and more striking. There are not many finer ranges of mountains of the same altitude than this. Derry Clare, Ben Growr, and Lettery, are all finely-formed mountains. There appeared to be on the right an inviting hollow among the hills, which seemed to promise a reward for the deviation from the road ; and I followed my inclination. The hollow was about four miles distant : and I found, as I expected, a deeply embosomed lake, which wanted only an easy access to its banks, in order to enjoy a high reputation for the boldness and picturesque outline of its mountain boundaries. I rested for a little while in a house at no great distance from it ; and found the owner in sufficiently comfortable circumstances. He had a hundred head of black cattle, and many horses, and several cows, and about five acres under potatoes and oats, and

paid only 15*l.* on a lease of ninety-nine years. I was told of a lake, called Loch Ina, farther to the north ; and from a shoulder of Derry Clare, I obtained a view over it. It appeared to be partially wooded, and very solitary and remote. I did not visit it ; but retraced my steps to the point where I had left the road. Everywhere along this line of country, the views are most pleasing. The mountain outline is highly picturesque in its form ; the slopes are dotted with sheep ; and on the low grounds, vast herds of cattle, and troops of horses, are seen feeding ; and the wild gambols, and graceful motions, of these scarce-tamed creatures, give great life and interest to the scene. On the other side of a lake, on the left of the road. Dean Mahon owns a handsome house. It is very agreeably situated, with a good deal of wood about it ; and would be a delightful retreat for a man of a contemplative mind, and fond of occasional solitude.

This line of road is in a shameful condition : it is impassable to any vehicle, unless with the assistance of half-a-dozen men, to carry it, or at least to assist its progress, over the unfinished parts of the road. When I say vehicle, I mean an Irish jaunting-car of the strongest build. For any other more ambitious carriage, the road is impassable with any assistance. To complete this road, would not cost 300*l.* ; and yet the gentlemen of Gal way allow it to remain in its present condition, while ten times 300*l.*, perhaps, is swallowed up in jobs.

I passed through a considerable tract of country here, without any inhabitants, or any cultivation ; but houses began to appear, as I approached Ballinahinch. I spent an hour or two in this neighbourhood, sitting with, and talking with, and *tasting* with, the small landholders. I found them generally in a situation of comparative comfort ; I do not mean, that they actually lived comfortably ; but that there was nothing in the circumstances in which they were placed, to prevent the enjoyment of comfort. All had one, two, or more cows ; all had turf for nothing : and all had the privilege of fishing during a certain season. These are great advantages, unknown to the small farmer of the flat and fertile districts. I must not omit to say, that every one had his little patch of barley, for the manufacture of potheen : and he made no secret of it.

I now came in sight of Ballinahinch, which is not the kind of place one would expect to find as the residence of an individual who is the king of these districts, and through whose dominions one has been travelling during the greater part of thirty miles. The situation of the house is good : it stands upon the well-wooded bank of a long narrow lake ; and is backed by a magnificent range of dark and lofty mountains ; but the edifice itself has nothing baronial about it : its look is quite modern ; and it is rather diminutive. Over all his own country, however, Mr. Martin is quite a sovereign. An individual, speaking to me of the family, said, that Colonel Martin, that is—the Martin—was the best Martin that ever “reigned” Mr. Martin was in London when I was in the neighbourhood.

I did not proceed to Clifden by the straight road from Ballinahinch ; but, soon after, turned to the right, on the road that leads to Roundstone,—the village, situated on Birterbuy bay, founded by that late highly gifted individual, Mr. Nimmo, whose extensive knowledge of Ireland, and her capabilities and wants, is on record ; and may serve as a guide to all who would devise means for benefiting the people.

The road by which I journeyed to Roundstone conducted me through a wild and not very picturesque country. I passed, on the way side, a very solitary chapel and burying-ground,—the few tombs, marked by rough upright stones, or small wooden crosses ; a few crooked stunted trees grew here and there ; a little rivulet skirted the place of graves, and murmured pleasantly by ; and when I passed, two old men were employed in leisurely digging a grave.

Soon after passing this spot. I came within sight of Roundstone, and skirted several narrow arms of the sea. On the shores of all these bays, smoke was rising from numerous spots where the people were burning sea-weed for kelp.

Roundstone cuts no great figure in approaching it : but the country on both sides of the road, offers sufficient interest. Most encouraging proofs are every where to be seen, of the capabilities of the bogs of Cunnemara. On the same land, I saw heaps of turf newly cut out of the bog ; and close by, the finest crops of oats, potatoes, barley, and even wheat. There is no crop that cannot be produced by the aid of either limestone, or of other natural products of this neighbourhood,—coral sand, and seaweed. These have an advantage over limestone, inasmuch as they need no quarrying or preparation. First-rate crops are here produced the third year. Potatoes are generally taken for the two first crops ; and these, by the operation of trenching, drain the land. Oats then follow ; and extraordinary crops are produced ; sixteen barrels, 207 stone to the barrel, is not reckoned an uncommon product of an acre.

There is, perhaps, no part of Ireland so well adapted for experimenting on waste lands, and reclaimable bogs, as Cunnemara. No part of Cunnemara is more than six miles from some sea bay, or lake having a communication with the sea. If there were good roads in all directions, this length of land carriage would not be great : but even this distance would be much diminished, by improving and connecting the navigation of the chains of lakes which extend through every part of Cunnemara. One part of that chain drains into Loch Corrib, and through it to the bay of Galway : the other part drains into the western bays. One has but to glance at the map, to see how much nature has done for Cunnemara ; and in enumerating the advantages offered in this district for the cultivation of its wastes, the easy acquisition of the means of cultivation,—sand and seaweed,—must always be kept prominently in view.

Roundstone is a straggling village, situated on the west side of Roundstone bay, which is a part of Birterbny bay. The village is little more than seven years old, and, for its age, has an aspect of tolerable prosperity. There are about thirty-five houses in the village, and eight or ten building. The exports from Roundstone are oats, turf, and sea-weed, for Galway, and the ports of Clare. The export of grain, however, I suspect, is as yet but trifling. Cunnemara is supposed at present to produce about 1500 tons of oats ; but a large portion of this quantity is made into whiskey ; and besides, Roundstone is not the only port of Cunnemara. Many intelligent persons are of opinion that the site of Roundstone was ill chosen ; and that it will never rise to any great prosperity.

The embarrassed condition of some of the land-owners of this part of Ireland has produced, along with much evil, one good result. It is the custom, in very many parts of Ireland, to allow one half year's rent to be constantly in arrear, *i.e.* the first half year's is not called for till the end of the year ; and the second half year's rent, not till the expiration of eighteen months. By this system, all tenants are in the power of the landlord ; and the state of affairs in Cunnemara, which has, on some estates, compelled these arrears to be paid up, has, in my opinion, acted most favourably upon the future condition of the tenant, by making him a more independent man, and by placing him less within the reach of a capricious or embarrassed landlord. It would be well, if tenants throughout Ireland could be persuaded to wave this fancied advantage, which has now grown almost into a privilege.

Behind Roundstone rises the mountain called Urrisbeg, which I ascended the evening after my arrival in Roundstone. There is a mountain-path, about half way up ; and the remainder of the ascent is through heathy slopes, and over rocks, with scarcely any bog-land intervening. Cunnemara is remarkable for the variety of flowers and plants which grow wild upon its mountains. I gathered on Urrisbeg many very beautiful, and some of them rare, wild flowers ;

amongst others, the Irish heath, or bell-heather; the beautifully pink-streaked water pimpernel ; the eye-bright, with its little yellow eye ; the bright-tinted tormentilla ; gentiana ; the red bear berry ; London pride, though not then in flower ; innumerable heaths,—amongst others, the erica limerea, adiantum, capillus Veneris, or maiden hair ; the bilberry ; dwarf juniper ; the silver leaf, &c. The Mediterranean heath (erica Mediterranea) is also found on these mountains ; as well as the Menziesia polifolia.

The view from the summit of Urrisbeg is more singular than beautiful. Here, Cunnemara is perceived to be truly that which its name denotes—“ bays of the sea.” The whole western coast of Cunnemara is laid open with its innumerable bays and inlets : but the most striking and singular part of the view is that to the north, over the districts called Urris-beg and Urris-more. These are wide level districts, spotted by. an almost uncountable number of lakes : and mostly entirely uncultivated and uninhabited. I endeavoured, from my elevated position, to reckon the number of lakes ; and succeeded in counting upwards of a hundred and sixty. Shoulders of the mountain, however, shut out from the view some of the nearer parts of the plains ; and other parts were too distant to allow any very accurate observation ; so that I have no doubt there may be three hundred lakes, great and small, in this wild and very singular district. Several of the lakes have islands upon them ; and by the aid of a good telescope, which I carried with me, I perceived that many of these islands were wooded. A tract of this country, six miles in diameter, is at present let for 6*l.* 4*s.*

It has been a common saying, by way of expressing the barbarous condition of this part of Ireland, that the king’s writ never went over Cunnemara : and I believe that where there has been any inclination to dispute the progress of the king’s writ, the saying is a true one. Some curious stories are current upon this subject ; but I do not feel myself justified in repeating them. It is certain that no suspicious stranger can proceed far into Cunnemara, without intelligence of his arrival being conveyed to the remotest part of it. I was informed—I do not vouch for the truth of the story—that when it was necessary to publish the Act authorising the holding of markets at Roundstone, and when the sheriff came down on this business, he was made drunk by those who accompanied him, at Ouchterard ; and by way of security, all papers, excepting those relating to the business upon which he was sent, were taken out of his pocket, sealed up, and left behind.

A Journey Throughout Ireland During the Spring, Summer, and Autumn of 1834 (1838)

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