The Martins of Ross

Irish Memories

Violet Florence Martin

An account of Robert Jasper Martin, of Ross

By “ Martin Ross”

1917

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A few years ago Martin wrote an account of her eldest brother, Robert, known and loved by a very wide circle outside his own family as “ Ballyhooley.” He died in September, 1905, and in the following spring, one of his many friends. Sir Henniker Heaton, wrote to my cousin and begged her to help him in compiling a book that should be a memorial of Robert, of his life, his writings, and of his very distinguished and valuable political work as a speaker and writer in the Unionist cause. Sir Henniker Heaton died, and the project unfortunately fell through, but not before my cousin had written an ac-count of Robert, and, incidentally, a history of Ross and the Martins which is in itself so interesting, and that, indirectly, accounts for so many of her own characteristics, that, although much that she had meant to write remains unaccomplished, I propose, unfinished though it is, to make it the foremost chapter in these idle and straying recollections.
E.Œ. Summerville. *September* 20*th* 1917

Part I

My brother Robert’s life began with the epoch that has changed the face and the heart of Ireland. It ended untimely, in strange accord with the close of that epoch ; the ship has sunk, and he has gone down with it.

He was born on June 17th, 1846, the first year of the Irish famine, when Ireland brimmed with a potato-fed population, and had not as yet discovered America. The quietness of untroubled centuries lay like a spell on Connemara, the country of his ancestors ; the old ways of life were unquestioned at Ross, and my father went and came among his people in an intimacy as native as the soft air they breathed. On the crowded estate the old routine of potato planting and turf cutting was pursued tranquilly ; the people intermarried and subdivided their holdings ; few could read, and many could not speak English. All were known to the Master, and he was known and understood by them, as the old Galway people knew and understood ; and the subdivisions of the land were permitted, and the arrears of rent were given time, or taken in boat-loads of turf, or worked off by day-labour, and eviction was unheard of. It was give and take, with the personal element always warm in it : as a system it was probably quite uneconomic, but the hand of affection held it together, and the tradition of centuries was at its back.

The intimate relations of landlord and tenant were an old story at Ross. It was in the days of Queen Elizabeth that they began, when the Anglo-Norman families, known as the Tribes of Galway, still in the high summer of their singular and romantic prosperity, began to contemplate existence as being possible outside the walls of Galway Town, and by purchase or by conquest acquired many lands in the county. They had lived for three or four centuries in the town, self-sufficing, clannish and rich ; they did not forget the days of Strong-Bow,

who, in the time of Henry II, began the settlement of Galway, nor yet the leadership of De Burgho, and they maintained their isolation, and married and intermarried in inveterate exclusiveness, until, in the time of Henry VIII, relationship was so close and intricate that marriages were not easy. They rang the changes on Christian names, Nicholas, Dominick, Robert, Andrew ; they built great houses of the grey Galway limestone, with the Spanish courtyards and deep archways that they learned from their intercourse with Spain, and they carved their coats of arms upon them in that indomitable family pride that is an asset of immense value in the history of a country. Even now, the shop-fronts of Galway carry the symbols of chivalry above their doors, and battered shields and quarterings look strangely down from their places in the ancient walls upon the customers that pass in beneath them. It was in the sixteenth century that Robert Martin, one of the long and powerful line of High Sheriffs and Mayors of Galway, became possessed of a large amount of land in West Galway, and in 1590 Ross was his country place. From this point the Martins began slowly to assimilate West Galway ; Ross, Dangan, Birch Hall, and Ballinahinch, marked their progress, until Ballinahinch, youngest and greatest of the family strongholds, had gathered to itself nearly 200,000 acres of Connemara. It fell, tragically, from the hand of its last owner, Mary Martin, Princess of Connemara, in the time of the Famine, and that page of Martin history is closed in Galway, though the descendants of her grandfather, " Humanity Dick" (for ever to be had in honourable remembrance as the author of " Martin's Act for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals"), have kept alive the old name of Ballinahinch, and have opened a new and notable record for themselves in Canada.

Of Dangan, the postern gate by the Galway river remains ; of Birch Hall, the ruins of a courtyard and of a manorial dove-cot ; Ross, the first outpost, nurse of many generations of Martins, still stands by its lake and looks across it to its old neighbour, the brown mountain, Croagh Keenan.

Through a line of Jaspers, Nicholases and Roberts, the story of Ross moved prosperously on from Robert of Elizabeth's times, untouched even by the hand of Cromwell, unshaken even when the gates of Galway, twelve miles away, opened at length to Ireton. Beyond the town of Galway, the Cromwellian did not set his foot ; Connemara was a dark and barren country, and the Martins, Roman Catholic and Royalists to the core, as were all the other Tribes of Galway, held the key of the road.

From that conflict Ross emerged, minus most of its possessions in Galway town and suburbs ; after the Restoration they were restored by the Decree of Charles II, but remained nevertheless in the hands of those to whom they had been apportioned as spoil. The many links that had bound Ross to Galway Town seem thenceforward to have been severed ; during the eighteenth century the life of its owners was that of their surroundings, peaceful for the most part, and intricately bound up with that of their tenants. They were still Roman Catholic and Jacobite—a kinsman of Dangan was an agent for Charles Edward—and each generation provided several priests for its Church. With my great-grandfather, Nicholas, came the change of creed ; he became a Protestant in order to marry a Protestant neighbour. Miss Elizabeth O'Hara, of Lenaboy ; where an affair of the heart was concerned, he was not the man to stick at what he perhaps considered to be a trifle. It is said that at the end of his long life his early training asserted itself, and drew him again towards the Church of his fathers ; it is certainly probable that he died, as he was born, a son of Rome.

But the die had been cast. His six children were born and bred Protestants. Strong in all ways, they were strong Protestants, and Low Church, according to the fashion of their time, yet they lived in an entirely Roman Catholic district without religious friction of any kind.

It was during the life of Nicholas, my great-grandfather, that Ross House was burned down ; with much loss, it is believed, of plate and pictures ; it had a tower, and stood beautifully on a point in the lake. He replaced it by the present house, built about the year 1777, whose architecture is not æsthetically to his credit ; it is a tall, unlovely block, of great solidity, with kitchen premises half underground, and the whole surrounded by a wide and deep area. It suggests the idea of defence, which was probably not absent from the builder's mind, yet the Rebellion of twenty years later did not put it to the test. In the great storm of 1839, still known as " The Big Wind," my grandfather gathered the whole household into the kitchen for safety, and, looking up at its heavily-vaulted ceiling, said that if Ross fell, not a house in Ireland would stand that night. Many fell, but Ross House stood the assault, even though the lawn was white with the spray borne in from the Atlantic, six miles away. It has at least two fine rooms, a lofty well-staircase, with balusters of mahogany, taken out of a wreck, and it takes all day the sun into its heart, looking west and south, with tall windows, over lake and mountain. It is said that a man is never in love till he is in love with a plain woman, and in spite of draughts, of exhausting flights of stairs, of chimneys that are the despair of sweeps, it has held the affection of five generations of Martins.

A dark limestone slab, over the dining-room chimney-piece, bears the coat of arms—" a Calvary Cross, between the Sun in splendour on the dexter limb, and the Moon in crescent on the sinister of the second"—to quote the official description. The crest is a six-pointed star, and the motto, " Sic itur ad astra," connects with the single-minded simplicity of the Crusader, the Cross of our faith with the Star of our hope. In the book of pedigrees at Dublin Castle it is stated that the arms were given by Richard Cœur de Lion to Oliver Martin, in the Holy Land ; a further family tradition says that Oliver Martin shared Richard's captivity in Austria. The stone on which the arms are carved came originally from an old house in Galway ; it has the name of Robuck Martin below, and the date 1649 above. It is one of several now lying at Ross, resembling the lintels of doorways, and engraved with the arms of various Martins and their wives.

The Protestantism of my grandfather, Robert, did not deter him from marrying a Roman Catholic, Miss Mary Ann Blakeney, of Bally Ellen, Co. Carlow, one of three beauties known in Carlow and Waterford as " The Three Marys." As in most of the acts of his prudent and long-headed life, he did not do wrong. Her four children were brought up as Protestants, but the rites of her Church were celebrated at Ross without let or hindrance ; my brother Robert could remember listening at the drawing-room door to the chanting of the Mass inside, and prayers were held daily by her for the servants, all of whom, then as now, were Roman Catholics.

" Hadn't I the divil's own luck," groaned a stableboy, stuffing his pipe into his pocket as the prayer-bell clanged," that I didn't tell the Misthress I was a Protestant !"

She lived till 1855, a hale, quiet, and singularly handsome woman, possessed of the fortunate gift of living in amity under the same roof with the many and various relations-in-law who regarded Ross as their home. Family feeling was almost a religious tenet with my grandfather, and in this, as in other things, he lived up to his theories. Shrewd and patient, and absolutely proficient in the affairs of his property, he could take a long look ahead, even when the Irish Famine lay like a black fog upon all things ; and when he gave up his management of the estate there was not a debt upon it. One of his sayings is so unexpected in a man of his time as to be worth repeating. " If a man kicks me I suppose I must take notice of that," he said when reminded of some fancied affront to himself, " short of that, we needn't trouble ourselves about it." He had the family liking for a horse ; it is recorded that in a dealer's yard in Dublin he mounted a refractory animal, in his frock coat and tall hat, got him out of the yard, and took him round St. Stephen's Green at a gallop, through the traffic, laying into him

with his umbrella. He was once, in Dublin, induced to go to an oratorio, and bore it for some time in silence, till the choir reiterated the theme, " Go forth, ye sons of Aaron ! Go !" " Begad, here goes I" said my grandfather, rising and leaving the hall.

My father, James, was born in 1804, and grew up endowed, as many still testify, with good looks and the peculiarly genial and polished manner that seemed to be an attribute of the Galway gentlemen of his time. He had also a gift with his pen that was afterwards to serve him well, but the business capacity of his father was strangely absent from the character of an otherwise able man. He took his degree at Trinity College, Dublin, and was intended for the Bar, but almost before his dinners were eaten he was immersed in other affairs. He was but little over twenty when he married Miss Anne Higinbotham. It was a very happy marriage ; he and his wife, and the four daughters who were born to them, lived in his father's house at Ross, according to the patriarchal custom of the time, and my father abandoned the Bar, and lived then, as always, the healthy country life that he delighted in. He shot wood-cock with the skill that was essential in the days of muzzle-loaders, and pulled a good oar in his father's boat at the regattas of Lough Corrib and Lough Mask, as various silver cups still testify. I remember seeing him, a straight and spare man, well on in his sixth decade, take a racing spin with my brothers on Ross Lake, and though his stroke was pronounced by the younger generation to be old-fashioned, and a trifle stiff, he held his own with them. Robert has often told me that when they walked the grouse mountains together, his father could, at the end of the day, face a hill better than he, with all his equipment of youth and athleticism.

Among the silver cups at Ross was a two-handled one, that often fascinated our childhood, with the inscription :

" FROM HENRY ADAIR OF LOUGH ANMORE, TO JAMES MARTIN OF ROSS."

It was given to my father in memory of a duel in which he had acted as second, to Henry Adair, who was a kinsman of his first wife.

My father's first wife had no son ; she died at the birth of a daughter, and her loss was deep and grievous to her husband. Her four daughters grew up, very good-looking and very agreeable, and were married when still in their teens. Their husbands all came from the County Antrim, and two of them were brothers. Barklie, Callwell, McCalmont, Barton, are well-known names in Ireland to-day, and beyond it, and the children of his four elder sisters are bound to my brother Robert's life by links of long intimacy and profound affection.

The aim of the foregoing *résumé* of family history has been to put forward only such things as seem to have been determining in the environment and heritage to which Robert was born. The chivalrous past of Galway, the close intimacy with the people, the loyalty to family ties, were the traditions among which he was bred ; the Protestant instinct, and a tolerance for the sister religion, born of sympathy and personal respect, had preceded him for two generations, and a store of shrewd humour and common sense had been laid by in the family for the younger generation to profit by if they wished.

My father was a widower of forty when he first met his second wife. Miss Anna Selina Fox, in Dublin. She was then two and twenty, a slender girl, of the type known in those days as elegant, and with a mind divided in allegiance between outdoor amusements and the Latin poets. Her father, Charles Fox, of New Park, Co. Longford, was a barrister, and was son of Justice Fox, of the Court of Common Pleas. He married Katherine, daughter of Chief Justice Bushe, and died while still a young man ; his children were brought up at Kilmurrey, the house of their mother's father.

The career of the Right Honourable Charles Kendal Bushe, Chief Justice of Ireland, is a public one, and need not here be dwelt upon ; but even at this distance of time it thrills the hearts of his descendants to remember his lofty indifference to every voice save those of conscience and patriotism, when, in the Irish House of Commons, he opposed the Act of Union with all the noble gift of language that won for him the name " Silver-tongued Bushe," and left the walls ringing with the reiterated entreaty, " I ask you, gentlemen, will you give up your country !"

His attitude then and afterwards cost him the peerage that would otherwise have been his ; but above the accident of distinction, and beyond all gainsaying, is the fact that in the list of influential Irishmen made before the Union, with their probable prices (as supporters of the Act) set over against them, the one word following the name of Charles Kendal Bushe is " Incorruptible."

His private life rang true to his public utterances ; culture and charm, and a swift and delightful wit, made his memory a fetish to those who lived under his roof. My mother's early life moved as if to the music of a minuet. She learned Latin with a tutor, she studied the guitar, she sat in the old-fashioned drawing-room at Kilmurrey while " The Chief" read aloud Shakespeare, or the latest novel of Sir Walter Scott ; she wrote, at eight years old, verses of smooth and virtuous precocity ; at seventeen she translated into creditable verse, in the metre beloved of Pope, a Latin poem by Lord Wellesley, the then Viceroy, and received from him a volume in which it was included, with an inscription no less stately than the binding. In her outdoor life she was what, in those decorous days, was called a " Tomboy," and the physical courage of her youth remained her distinguishing characteristic through life. Like the lilies of the field, she toiled not, neither did she spin, yet I have never known a more feminine character.

It was from her that her eldest son derived the highly strung temperament, the unconscious keenness of observation that was only stimulated by the short sight common to them both, the gift of rapid versifying, and a deftness and brilliance in epigram and repartee that came to both in lineal descent from " The Chief." An instance of Robert's quickness in retort occurs to me, and I will give it here. It happened that he was being examined in a land case connected with Ross. The solicitor for the other side objected to the evidence that he gave, as relating to affairs that occurred before he was born, and described it as " hearsay evidence."

" Well, for the matter of that, the fact that I was born is one that I have only on hearsay evidence !" said Robert unanswerably.

My mother first met my father at the house of her uncle, Mr. Arthur Bushe, in Dublin. She met him again at a ball given by Kildare Street Club ; they had in common the love of the classics and the love of outdoor life ; his handsome face, his attractiveness, have been so often dwelt on by those who knew him at that time, that the mention of them here may be forgiven. In March, 1844, they were married in Dublin, and a month later their carriage was met a couple of miles from Ross by the tenants, and was drawn home by them, while the bonfires blazed at the gates and at the hall door, and the bagpipes squealed their welcome. Bringing with her a great deal of energy, both social and literary, a kicking pony, and a profound ignorance of household affairs, my mother entered upon her long career at Ross. That her sister-in-law, Marian Martin, held the reins of office was fortunate for all that composite establishment ; when, later on, my mother took them in her delicate, impatient hands, she held the strictly logical conviction that a sheep possessed four " legs of mutton," and she has shown me a rustic seat, hidden deep in laurels, where she was wont to hide when, as she said, " they came to look for me, to ask what was to be for the servants' dinner."

For the first year of her married life tranquillity reigned in house and estate ; a daughter was born, and was accepted with fortitude by an establishment already well equipped in that respect. But a darker possibility than the want of an heir arose suddenly and engrossed all minds.

In July, 1845, my father drove to the Assizes in Galway, twelve and a half English miles away, and as he drove he looked with a knowledgeable eye at the plots of potatoes lying thick and green on either side of the road, and thought that he had seldom seen a richer crop. He slept in Galway that night, and next day as he drove home the smell of the potato-blight was heavy in the air, a new and nauseous smell. It was the first breath of the Irish famine. The succeeding months brought the catastrophe, somewhat limited in that first winter, a blow to startle, even to stun, but not a death-stroke. Optimistically the people flung their thoughts forward to the next crop, and bore the pinch of the winter with spasmodic and mismanaged help from the Government, with help, lesser in degree, but more direct, from their landlords.

In was in the following summer of stress and hope that my brother Robert was born, in Dublin, the first son in the Martin family for forty-two years, and the welcome accorded to him was what might have been expected. The doctor was kissed by every woman in the house, so he assured my brother many years afterwards, and, late at night as it was, my father went down to Kildare Street Club to find some friend to whom he could tell the news (and there is a touch of appropriateness in the fact that the Club, that for so many years was a home for Robert, had the first news of his birth).

Radiant with her achievement my mother posted over the long roads to Ross, in the summer weather, with her precious first-born son, and the welcome of Ross was poured forth upon her. The workmen in the yard kissed the baby’s hands, the old women came from the mountains to prophesy and to bless and to perform the dreadful rite of spitting upon the child, for luck. My father’s mother, honourable as was her wont towards her husband’s and son’s religion, asked my mother if a little holy water might be sprinkled on the baby.

“ If you heat it you may give him a bath in it !” replied the baby’s mother, with irrepressible light-heartedness.

It may be taken for granted that he received, as we all did, secret baptism at the hands of the priest. It was a kindly precaution taken by our foster mothers, who were, it is needless to say, Roman Catholics ; it gave them peace of mind in the matter of the foster children whom they worshipped, and my father and mother made no inquiries. Their Low Church training did not interfere with their common sense, nor did it blind them to the devotion that craved for the safeguard.

A month or two later the cold fear for the safety of the potatoes fell again upon the people ; the paralysing certainty followed. The green stalks blackened, the potatoes turned to black slime, and the avalanche of starvation, fever and death fell upon the country. It was in the winter of 1847, “ the black ’47,” as they called it, when Robert was in his second year, that the horror was at its worst, and before hope had kindled again his ears must have known with their first understanding the weak voice of hunger and the moan of illness among the despairing creatures who flocked for aid into the yard and the long downstairs passages of Ross. Many stories of that time remain among the old tenants ; of the corpses buried where they fell by the roadside, near Ross Gate ; of the coffins made of loose boards tied round with a hay rope. None, perhaps, is more pitiful than that of a woman who walked fifteen miles across a desolate moor, with a child in her arms and a child by her side, to get the relief that she heard was to be had at Ross. Before she reached the house the child in her arms was dead ; she carried it into the kitchen and sank on the flags. When my aunt spoke to her she

found that she had gone mad ; reason had stopped in that whelming hour, like the watch of a drowned man.

A soup-kitchen was established by my father and mother at one of the gates of Ross ; the cattle that the people could not feed were bought from them, and boiled down, and the gates were locked to keep back the crowd that pressed for the ration. Without rents, with poor rate at 22*s*. 6*d*. in the pound, the household of Ross staggered through the intimidating years, with the starving tenants hanging, as it were, upon its skirts, impossible to feed, impossible to see unfed. The rapid pens of my father and mother sent the story far ; some of the great tide of help that flowed into Ireland came to them ; the English Quakers loaded a ship with provisions and sent them to Galway Bay. Hunger was in some degree dealt with, but the Famine fever remained undefeated. My aunt, Marian Martin (afterwards Mrs. Arthur Bushe), caught it in a school that she had got together on the estate, where she herself taught little girls to read and write and knit, and kept them alive with breakfasts of oatmeal porridge. My aunt has told me how, as she lay in the blind trance of the fever, my grandfather, who believed implicitly in his own medical skill, opened a vein in her arm and bled her. The relief, according to her account, was instant and exquisite, and her recovery set in from that hour. She may have owed much to the determination of the Martins of that period that they would not be ill. My mother, herself a daring rebel against the thraldom of illness, used to say that at Ross no one was ill till they were dead, and no one was dead till they were buried. It was the Christian Science of a tough-grained generation.

The little girls whom my aunt taught are old women now, courteous in manner, cultivated in speech, thanks to the education that was given them when National Schools were not.

Our kinsman, Thomas Martin of Ballinahinch, fell a victim to the Famine fever, caught in the Courthouse while discharging his duties as a magistrate. He was buried in Galway, forty miles by road from Ballinahinch, and his funeral, followed by his tenants, was two hours in passing Ross Gate. In the words of A. M. Sullivan, " No adequate tribute has ever been paid to those Irish landlords—and they were men of every party and creed—who perished, martyrs to duty, in that awful time ; who did not fly the plague-reeking workhouse, or fever-tainted court." Amongst them he singled out for mention Mr. Martin of Ballinahinch, and Mr. Nolan of Ballinderry (father of Colonel Nolan, M.P.), the latter of whom died of typhus caught in Tuam Workhouse.

When Robert was three years old, the new seed potatoes began to resist the blight ; he was nearly seven before the victory was complete, and by that time the cards that he must play had already been dealt to him.

II

The Famine yielded like the ice of the Northern Seas ; it ran like melted snows in the veins of Ireland for many years afterwards. Landlords who had escaped ruin at the time were more slowly ruined as time went on and the money borrowed in the hour of need exacted its toll ; Ross held its ground, with what stress its owners best knew. It was in those difficult years of Robert's boyhood, when yet more brothers and sisters continued to arrive rapidly, that his father began to write for the Press. He contributed leading articles to the Morning Herald, a London paper, now extinct ; he went to London and lived the life that the writing of leading articles entails, with its long waiting for the telegrams, and its small-hour suppers, and it told on the health of a man whose heart had been left behind him in the West. It tided over the evil time, it brought him into notice with the Conservative Party and the Irish Government, and probably gained for him subsequently his appointment of Poor Law Auditor.

His style in writing is quite unlike that of his eldest son ; it is more rigid, less flowing ; the sentences are short and pointed, evidently modelled on the rhythmic hammer-stroke of Macaulay ; it has not the careless and sunshiny ease with which Robert achieved his best at the first attempt. That facility and versification that is akin to the gift of music, and, like it, is inborn, came from my mother, and came to him alone of his eight brothers and sisters ; in her letters to her children she dropped into doggerel verse without an effort, rhymes and metres were in her blood, and to the last year of her life she never failed to criticise occasional and quite insignificant roughnesses in her son's poems. Of her own polished and musical style one verse in illustration may be given.

" In the fond visions of the silent night,
I dreamt thy love, thy long sought love, was won ;
Was it a dream, that vision of delight — ?
I woke ; 'twas but a dream, let me dream on !"

Robert was a nervous, warm-hearted boy, dark-eyed and romantic-looking ; the sensitive nature that expanded to affection was always his, and made him cling to those who were kind to him. The vigorous and outdoor life of Ross was the best tonic for such a nature, the large and healthful intimacy with lake and woods, bog and wild weather, and shooting and rowing, learned unconsciously from a father who delighted in them, and a mother who knew no fear for herself and had little for her children. Everything in those early days of his was large and vigorous ; tall trees to climb, great winds across the lake to wrestle with, strenuous and capable talk upstairs and downstairs, in front of furnaces of turf and logs, long drives, and the big Galway welcome at the end of them. One day was like another, yet no day was monotonous. Prayers followed breakfast, long prayers, beginning with the Psalms, of which each child read a verse in due order of seniority ; then First and Second Lessons, frequently a chapter from a religious treatise, finally a prayer, from a work named " The Tent and Altar," all read with excellent emphasis by the master of the house. In later years, after Robert had matriculated at Trinity College, I remember with what youthful austerity he read prayers at Ross, and with what awe we saw him reject " The Tent and Altar" and heard him recite from memory the Morning Prayers from the Church Service. He was at the same time deputed to teach Old Testament history to his brothers and sisters ; to this hour the Judges of Israel are painfully stamped on my brain, as is the tearful morning when the Bible was hurled at my inattentive head by the hand of the remorseless elder brother.

Robert's early schoolroom work at Ross was got through with the ease that may be imagined by anyone who has known his quickness in assimilating ideas and his cast-iron memory. As was the case with all the Ross children, the real interests of the day were with the workmen and the animals. The agreeability of the Galway peasant was enthralling ; even to a child ; the dogs were held in even higher esteem. Throughout Robert's life dogs knew him as their friend ; skilled in the lore of the affections, they recognised his gentle heart, and the devotion to him of his Gordon setter, Rose, is a thing to remember. Even of late years I have seen him hurry away when his sterner sisters thought it necessary to chastise an offending dog ; the suffering of others was almost too keenly understood by him.

Reading aloud rounded off the close of those early days at Ross, Shakespeare and Walter Scott, Napier and Miss Edgeworth ; the foundation of literary culture was well and truly laid, and laid with respect and enthusiasm, so that what the boy's mind did not grasp was stored up for his later understanding, among things to be venerated, and fine diction and choice phrase were imprinted upon an ear that was ever retentive of music. Everyone who remembers his childhood remembers him singing songs and playing the piano. His ear was singularly quick, and I think it was impossible for him to sing out of tune. He learned his notes in the school-

room, but his musical education was dropped when he went to school, as is frequently the case ; throughout his life he accompanied himself on the piano by ear, with ease, if with limitations ; simple as the accompaniments were, there was never a false note, and it seemed as if his hands fell on the right places without an effort.

A strange feature in his early education and in the establishment at Ross was James Tucker, an ex-hedge schoolmaster, whose long face, blue shaven chin, shabby black clothes, and gift for poetry have passed inextricably into the annals of the household. He entered it first at the time of the Famine, ostensibly to give temporary help in the management and accounts of the school which my aunt Marian had started for the tenants' children ; he remained for many years, and filled many important posts. He taught us the three R's with rigour and perseverance, he wrote odes for our birthdays, he was controller-in-chief of the dairy ; later on, when my father received the appointment of Auditor of Poor Law, under the Local Government Board, Tucker filled in the blue " abstracts" of the Auditor's work in admirably neat columns. Robert's recital of the multiplication table was often interrupted by wails for " Misther Tucker" and the key of the dairy, from the kitchen-maid at the foot of the schoolroom stairs, and the interruption was freely cursed, in a vindictive whisper, by the schoolmaster. Tucker was slightly eccentric, a feature for which there was always toleration and room at Ross ; he entered largely into the schoolroom theatricals that sprang up as soon as Robert was old enough to whip up a company from the ranks of his brothers and sisters. The first of which there is any record is the tragedy of " Bluebeard," adapted by him at the age of eight. As the author did not feel equal to writing it down, it was taught to the actors by word of mouth, he himself taking the title *rôle*. The performance took place privately in the schoolroom, an apartment discreetly placed by the authorities in a wing known as " The Offices," beyond ken or call of the house proper. Tucker was stage manager, every servant in the house was commandeered as audience. The play met with much acceptance up to the point when Bluebeard dragged Fatima (a shrieking sister) round the room by her hair, belabouring her with a wooden sword, amid the ecstatic yells of the spectators, but at this juncture the mistress of the house interrupted the revels with paralysing suddenness. She had in vain rung the drawing-room bell for tea, she had searched and found the house mysteriously silent and empty, till the plaudits of the rescue scene drew her to the schoolroom. Players and audience broke into rout, and Robert's first dramatic enterprise ended in disorder, and, if I mistake not, for the principals, untimely bed.

It was some years afterwards, when Robert was at Trinity, that a similar effort on his part of missionary culture ended in a like disaster. He became filled with the idea of getting up a cricket team at Ross, and in a summer vacation he collected his eleven, taught them to hold a bat, and harangued them eloquently on the laws of the game. It was unfortunate that its rules became mixed up in the minds of the players with a game of their own, called " Burnt Ball," which closely resembles " Rounders," and is played with a large, soft ball. In the first day of cricket things progressed slowly, and the unconverted might have been forgiven for finding the entertainment a trifle dull. A batsman at length hit a ball and ran. It was fielded by cover-point, who, bored by long inaction, had waited impatiently for his chance. In the enthusiasm of at length getting something to do, the recently learned laws of cricket were swept from the mind of cover-point, and the rules of Burnt Ball instantly reasserted themselves. He hurled the ball at the batsman, shouting : " Go out ! You're burnt !" and smote him heavily on the head.

The batsman went out, that is to say, he picked himself up and tottered from the fire zone, and neither then nor subsequently did cricket prosper at Ross.

Then, and always, Robert shared his enthusiasm with others ; he gave himself to his surroundings, whether people or things, and, as afterwards, it was preferably people. He had the

gift of living in the present and living every moment of it ; it might have been of him that Carlyle said, " Happy men live in the present, for its bounty suffices, and wise men too, for they know its value."

Throughout Robert's school and college days theatricals, charades, and living pictures, written or arranged by him, continued to flourish at Ross. There remains in my memory a play, got up by him when he was about seventeen, in which he himself, despising the powers of his sisters, took the part of the heroine, with the invaluable Tucker as the lover. A tarletan dress was commandeered from the largest of the sisterhood, and in it, at the crisis of the play, he endeavoured to elope with Tucker over a clothes-horse, draped in a curtain. It was at this point that the tarletan dress, tried beyond its strength, split down the back from neck to waist ; the heroine flung her lover from her, and backed off the stage with her front turned firmly to the audience, and the elopement was deferred *sine die*.

Those were light-hearted days, yet they were indelible in Robert's memory, and the strength and savour of the old Galway times were in them as inextricably as the smell of the turf smoke and the bog myrtle. Nothing was conventional or stagnant, things were done on the spur of the moment, and with a total disregard for pomps and vanities, and everyone preferred good fun to a punctual dinner. Mingling with all were the poor people, with their cleverness, their good manners, and their unflagging spirits ; I can see before me the carpenter painting a boat by the old boat quay, and Robert sitting on a rock, and talking to him for long tracts of the hot afternoon. At another time one could see Robert holding, with the utmost zeal and discrimination, a court of arbitration in the coach-house for the settling of an intricate and vociferous dispute between two of the tenants.

Life at Ross was of the traditional Irish kind, with many retainers at low wages, which works out as a costly establishment with nothing to show for it. A sheep a week and a cow a month were supplied by the farm, and assimilated by the household ; it seemed as if with the farm produce, the abundance of dairy cows, the packed turf house, the fallen timber ready to be cut up, the fruitful garden, the game and the trout, there should have been affluence. But after all these followed the Saturday night labour bill, and the fact remains, as many Irish landlords can testify, that these free fruits of the earth are heavily paid for, that convenience is mistaken for economy, and that farming is, for the average gentleman, more of an occupation than an income.

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