

In search of the picturesque

Sir Frances B. Head, Bart

1852

•

FOURTH DAY.

At the fag-end of this summer, among a motley crowd of Tourists, by the irresistible power of Steam, I was injected into the island of Ireland, which I had never before seen. For a week, almost without winking, I looked it steadily in the face. For a similar period, in various localities, immured by myself, I was poring over data I deemed it necessary to obtain.

•

At seven o'clock in the morning I started edgeways—until I got tired I involuntarily, invariably, and unceasingly grumbled at this awkward attitude—from Clifden, with a new driver, and a long-stepping, nearly thorough-bred, bay horse, sound, six years old, and called, as the man at my back told me, “Ballinasloe,” because he had been bought there—and I may add, as a fact of greater importance than his name—for eleven pounds.

On each side of us, as we trotted along, were low stony hills covered with a mixture of heather and sedgy grass, before us a range of higher ones, on the summit of which soft white watery clouds were reposing. We now passed four substantial cabins unroofed, and I felt my flesh creep as I saw exuding from one of them a slight smoke, thus denoting, as I soon discovered, but too truly, that the lone sepulchre was still haunted by the living inmates who had been evicted from it. After traversing a splendid snipe-level we passed, at its extremity, another unroofed cabin, on the floor of which, as we drove by, I saw, in full bloom and luxuriance, the beautiful purple loosestrife. On our left, and apparently close to us, was that magnificent assemblage of mountains round which we had been travelling, namely, the Benna Beola, or Twelve Pins. In front were the Cashel Hills, on the right that of Erespeak. Close to us, on a small dark-coloured level, were four women, in bleached red petticoats and white shawls, arranging peat in heaps.

As we proceeded we came to two beautiful small placid lakes, from which there were rising such a quantity of rushes that the colour of the surface formed a series of gradual alternations from green to white water, and *vice versâ*. Around were heaps or tumuli of black peat.

As we were steadily trotting by the side of a small lake, called Darlie, there stood, close to its edge, a solitary melancholy-looking unroofed cabin.

“A great number of poor people,” said I to the driver, as, twisting my neck, I turned half way towards him, “appear to have been turned out of this country.”

“A good dale, Sir !” he replied, keeping his eye fixed steadily on his horse.

“Do you think the new system will answer ?”

“ I *do*, yere Arnh’r ! Until the last five or six years they niver had a grane (grain) crap in this county.”

“ Have you lived all your life in this neighbourhood ?”

“ Indade I have, Sir. They are taking great pathron (pattern) from the gintlemen who are coming into this counthry. All the pape (people) wants is a little instruction.”

“ Of what description ?” I inquired.

“ Yere Arnh’r ! they didn’t know how to reclaim their lands. When these English gintlemen came into the counthry, and they saw how *they* were draining their land and digging it up, they took pathron from them, and are now improving every other thimselves.”

“ How have you been living ?” I inquired.

“ For eleven years in the hotil. In summer I drive the car to support four of us. In winter we have nothing to do. Divil a hap’orth can we gain.”

We here met a fine bareheaded boy riding behind two panniers full of peat on a horse with a straw crupper, and, in lieu of one of Wilkinson and Kid’s double bridles, a straw halter.

“ The potatoes,” I observed to my driver as I pointed to the black-topped leaves of a small quantity growing by the road-side, “ seem to be failing a good deal.”

“ Yes, they did !” he replied.

After passing a few small patches of oats and potatoes we came to another great expanse of rough sedgy grass, on the left of which, towering close above us, at an average altitude of 2300 feet above the sea, were Bencullagh, Benhaun, Bencorr, and Benlettery, the finest portion of the Twelve Pins. A little boy had been running close behind the car for upwards of a mile. When he commenced to do so, I shook my hand, and, looking very sternly at him, said, “ No ! no !” To get rid of him, however, I at last held out to him a penny, which I conceived to be the object that was uppermost in his mind—in fact, the locomotive engine that was propelling him. His little fingers grasped mine as he took it, but, instead of triumphantly relaxing, as I expected he would, into a walk, he continued running about ten feet from us for more than another mile, in short, he was sociably disposed, and, like most people, preferred travelling in company to journeying alone ; indeed, from this social feeling, my car was often followed for miles by boys, and occasionally by little girls.

On our left I now saw a small house, surrounded by a tiny field of oats, the property of a man, Adams, who had been severely reduced by the famine. On the road-side, covered with a rude garment exactly of the colour of earth, sat a remarkably fine-looking woman of about forty, knitting and minding four cows. After passing her, we suddenly saw beneath us, sparkling in the sun, a most beautiful, large, long serpentine lake, called Ballynahinch, studded with small islands, on one of which were the picturesque ruins of an ancient castle.

“ That’s auld Dick Martin’s !” said my driver, pointing towards it with his whip : “ ut was the prison,” he added, “ where he confined pape that were cruel to animals.”

“ But whereabouts,” I asked, “ did old Dick Martin live himself ?”

“ I’ll show yere Arnh’r immadiately !” he replied ; and accordingly, in about one hundred yards, he pointed to *two* large residences, more than a mile from each other, both partly concealed from view by the wood that clothes the whole of the southern boundary of the water. Of these handsome-looking edifices, one was the house and the other the stables of the late Mr. Martin. The latter building, however, as is but too often the case, had ruined the former. The proprietor of both unfortunately became ruined, lost a property extending from his house to Oughterard, a distance of twenty-five miles ; and his daughter, a lady of considerable literary attainments, alas ! died on her passage to America.

The Lake of Ballynahinch communicates on the north with Loughs Inagh and Derryclare, the eastern boundary of the Benna Beola, or Twelve Pin Mountains ; and the surplus waters of all three flow from Ballynahinch through the deep and ample channel of the Owenmore River into Round-stone Harbour, and from it into the great Atlantic Ocean.

As we were trotting along the bank of the bright, lovely lake on our right, we overtook a car on which were three English tourists, forming altogether a pleasing picture of a happy family. On the left bench sat two young men in wide-awake hats and shooting jackets, one holding a landing-net, the other a rod in several lengths bound together by little straps. On the opposite bench was a very old, hale gentleman—apparently the father,—sitting erect, with his fishing-rod, longer than a Cossack’s lance, pointing to his zenith. Close by his side sat a useful, bareheaded, ragged little boy, with red, naked feet and ankles dangling against the drab-coloured, gaiter-covered calves of his aged neighbour’s long, lean legs. In the middle of the whole, bolt upright, sat the driver. I need hardly say they were on a fishing excursion, for which the neighbourhood of Ballynahinch has long been celebrated. The lake of that name, as we journeyed along its picturesque banks, appeared to be upwards of two miles in length by about a half or a quarter of a mile in breadth, and at its extremity we took leave of those twelve pins, around two sides of which, from north to south and then from west to east, we had so long been trotting. As we were proceeding alongside of a river on our right, we passed, on a lonely desolate road, an extremely beautiful bare-footed girl of about 17, whose hair, unrestrained even by her ears, was hanging in a state of perfect nature on her shoulders. On her back was a bundle, and in her right hand, which was vibrating easily by her side, there swung a very small bonnet. Altogether she was a fine specimen of the Connemara peasantry, considered to be the tallest and handsomest in Ireland. The river now introduced us to another long beautiful lake, full of little islands from 100 yards in length to a single black rock protruding from the water. Most of these romantic islands were covered with wood ; and we had scarcely taken leave of them all, when we trotted by the side of another square lough called Garroman, or Glendalough, upwards of a mile in length by half a mile in breadth, in which were two rocky islands, ornamented with brushwood of various shades of green. In a very short distance we came to two other lakes, at the extremity of which was an unroofed cabin, the only representative of a human habitation in sight. Near it stood, alone and all forlorn, a finger-post, on which was the name of a branch road.

“ What is written on that ?” I unkindly inquired of my driver, who had remained silent, I thought, rather too long.

“ I don’t read, yere Arnh’r !” was his reply.

After ascending a slight acclivity,—the termination of the district of Connemara,—there suddenly appeared, lying prostrate before us, Lough Lindy, bounded at a distance by a wild group of magnificent-looking, high, conical mountains. We here met two barefooted, bare-headed boys, riding on a horse with a straw halter. On the left of this lake was a whitewashed building, which from its shape (for they have almost all been built on the same plan) I in-

stantly recognised to be a constabulary barrack. Beyond it, at intervals, were three other whitewashed houses, the only habitations in sight.

On entering the barrack, the windows of which were wide open, the walls milk white, and the floors as clean as a kitchen dresser, I found one constable (a Protestant) and four sub-constables (Catholics), all as neat, as closely shaved, as tightly buttoned up, and with accoutrements as well appointed as if they had been on guard at St. James's Palace.

The constable, an exceedingly fine, handsome, well-behaved, intelligent-looking young man, of about 29 years of age, who had been at the station two years and seven months, told me that he and his party could get no provisions from the surrounding country ; and that, accordingly, they obtained their groceries from Galway, 36 miles off, [1] and the rest from Clifden, distant in the opposite direction 14 miles (English).

“ Can't you get *potatoes* here ?” I observed.

“ No !” he replied ; “ we cannot get a ha'porth of anything else.” After a moment's reflection he added, “ Milk, and that's very dear—that's the only thing we can obtain. For our mate, butter, and fish, we send to Clifden. On Friday the men generally eat milk and butter.”

“ But can't you get fish out of the lake ?” said I, pointing with my umbrella to the beautiful expanse of water before us.

“ No, Sir !” he replied, very gravely ; “ we're not allowed to fish. I wish,” he added, with a pleasing smile, “ *I wish we were !*”

The words seemed to stab me like a sword. For many hours I had been almost solitarily gazing upon an expanse of water which, although beautifully subdivided in endless variety, appeared to form very nearly half of this desolate but magnificent portion of Connemara. By the beneficent arrangements of Providence this extensive aqueous district was, of course, more or less teeming with fish.

Now, it was easy to comprehend that it may be highly advisable that the constabulary of Ireland, whose discipline it is so necessary to maintain, should, especially in their remote stations, be discouraged, or, in strict military parlance, should be forbidden from cultivating gardens, killing game, or catching fish—amusements which would inevitably divert their time, and distract their attention from the vigilant, important, and unceasing duties they have to perform. And yet, when I listened to the words I have just repeated, and observed the truth, obedience, and self-command with which they were expressed, I own I felt a pang, which it required a few moments' reflection to convert into indescribable admiration of the man who had uttered them, and of the general discipline of the force of which he was a worthy representative.

“ How's the climate here in winter ?” I inquired of him.

“ Very wet and very rough,” he replied.

“ Have you much frost ?”

“ No,” said he ; “ there's very little frost or snow in Connemara ; it is, I think, too near the sea.”

“ Is it healthy ?”

“ Very, Sir,” he replied ; “ but,” after a short pause, he added, very gravely, “ there is no place of worship. I have not been in one for two years and a half. The other men have one within three miles.”

On the table, at which I sat copying in my book his words as fast as he pronounced them, there was lying his Bible.

“ You have got *that*,” said I, “ at all events ; and with it, and a consciousness that you are performing your duty, you should try to rest satisfied ;” and I then explained to him how many of our soldiers and sailors were occasionally similarly situated.

“ What you say is very true. Sir !” he replied, with an aspiration amounting very nearly to a sigh.

Just before we had stopped at the barrack we had met a young, well-dressed Englishman, walking along the road. Immediately opposite, on the other side of the lake, was his beautiful farm, with a residence surrounded by trees. At the end of the lake we passed close by a small slated house, with offices, environed by trees growing luxuriantly—the residence, I was informed, of Mr. Tiger (a Protestant), of Dublin.

“ What is the price of provisions in this country ?” I inquired of the driver, who readily replied as follows : —

“ Chickuns are about *5d.* a couple, dooks *10d.* A couple of young gaise *10d.* ; when auld, not less than *1s.* or *14d.*

“ And turkeys ?” I asked.

“ I can’t say ; we havn t many of thim in the counthry, and I don’t want to tell yere Arnh’r a lie. Fish little or nothing. A large turbot, of 30 lbs. weight, for *3s.* Lobsters, a dozen for *4d.* Soles, *2d.* or *3d.* a-piece. T’other day I bought a turbot, of 15 lbs. weight, for a gentleman, and I paid *18d.* for ut.”

We here met a boy with a book in his hand, and shortly afterwards two more, going to Mr. Tiger to school.

“ Has yere Arnh’r ever sane an agle ?” said my driver, pointing to a magnificent pair of brown eagles chained to a post close to a house we were now passing. “ There was a pair,” he added, “ of ’um on that island, that lived there one hundred years, till they gort quite grey. They grab fish in the middle of the lake, and, when too heavy, I’ve sane ’em put up a wing like a sail, and bring it ashore.”

“ Have you *really* seen them do that ?” I Pickwickianly inquired.

“ I *did*, Sir !” he replied ; “ and then they ate it.”

As he was speaking, a large heron, with white body and quaker-grey wings, majestically rose from the lakeshore, and, with its long neck pointing to its course, away it slowly flew.

“ Now take yereself away out o’ that !” exclaimed the driver, very sharply, to a pretty little girl of about 13 years of age that was running behind us.

The lake now branched into two more, separated from each other by a small, serpentine, silver thread of water, and the country then changed into a great expanse of flat, snipey ground, covered with rank, sedgy grass, intermingled more or less with heather ; in a short time we drove up to a solitary post-house, called Flyn’s Hotel, a low, irregular-shaped, white-washed building, surrounded by dilapidated stone walls, enclosing sometimes something of very little value, and sometimes nothing but loose stones. Altogether it was the wildest-looking spot I had seen for a long time ; indeed it much reminded me of a Gaucho’s hut in South America.

Behind it was the extensive grassy land we had just passed. Before it a beautiful lake, called Shindilla, studded with islands covered with wood. Immediately on the left was the termination of the Foynes mountains, the summits of which were so bald, barren, and bleak that it was evident at a glance that the whole range would not afford sustenance for a mouse. Beyond the lake were distant hills covered with heather.

Just as I was starting with a fresh horse, car, and driver, I heard a voice close before my knees say, “ I suspect yere Arnh’r wull not forget the arsler ?”

“ What ?” I inquired. The driver explained to me it was the horsler.

The lovely lake Shindilla, and two others with which it is connected by isthmuses and bridges, are above three miles in length. We here came to a white house, the office of Mr. Robertson, a Scotchman, agent to the great London Insurance Company by whom almost the whole of the surrounding country has been lately purchased, and yet since we had left Clifden I had scarcely seen any stock.

As we were driving through an immense plain of rough grass and heather,

“ Do you live in that place where we changed cars ?” I inquired of my driver, who had the appearance of being rather a dull companion.

“ I do, Sir,” he replied.

“ Were you *born* there ?”

“ I was indade, yere Arnh’r !” he replied with a yawn. “ I work at the shovel, I can mow, or rape, or anything.”

“ Where do you go to church ?”

“ At ——” (I could not copy the sound, for it appeared to be composed merely of a common cough and bark in about equal proportions), “ tin miles off ixactly.”

“ How often?” I asked.

“ Once a wake, sometimes once a fortnight.”

“ How many people attend ?”

“ Oich !” he replied, “ there’s a great dale.”

“ But how *many* ?” I asked.

“ Oich ! I couldn’t till, yere Arnh’r ; there’d be a graight number.”

“ What do you live on ?”

“ Pitaturs, milk, and butter. In summer I ate bread.”

“ Did you suffer much during the famine ?”

“ And indade I did *not*, thank God !”

At five miles from Shandilla, from which we had started, we came to some patches of oats, growing by the side of a small lake ; and, after passing a solitary cabin, another beautiful lake, about a mile long, surrounded on all sides by grouse-shooting hills, gradually came in view. We here met a small boy and two little girls. “ God bless yere Arnh’r !” said the former as he ravenously picked up a penny I had thrown to him.

As the roan horse trotted steadily onwards, we passed on our right along a sedgy, snipey strip, composed sometimes of green and yellow grass, and sometimes of water. At seven miles from Shandilla we came to seven or eight cabins, surrounded by several patches of oats and potatoes, and shortly afterwards the narrow stream beside us ended in a lake half a mile long, terminating in a small village, which my driver told me was called “ Durrarglin.” I here found nearly finished a substantial stone, slated building, of four windows in front, a Protestant school, and shortly afterwards, trotting through a congregation of sixteen huts, called Glenrowlen, where our eyes were refreshed by the sight of about a dozen women in red petticoats, we emerged from the mountains into, comparatively speaking, a flat country of heather and coarse grass. In it, at some distance on the right, appeared two white buildings and slight machinery, in the immediate vicinity of some lead-mines, worked by about forty or fifty people.

The day was beautifully soft and cloudy, and as we drove through a dead snipe-flat about three-quarters of a mile long we met a horse and cart ; and at nine and a half miles from Shandilla, after ascending a slight acclivity, we suddenly beheld an immense open country of poor land, bounded by that great inland sea Lough Corrib, which, by a river of the same name, is connected with the maritime town and harbour of Gal way.

On the north, Lough Corrib has lately been made to communicate with the great Lough Mask ; and as it will be evident to the reader that the three districts of Iar Connaught, Joyce’s Country, and Connemara are singularly mixed up with, as well as bounded by, inland lakes of immense extent, a few observations on the subject may be deemed necessary.

In a climate so humid as Ireland drainage is an indispensable preliminary to agricultural improvement, but to render practicable that description of minor field drainage which is effected by straightening and deepening watercourses, &c., it is indispensable that proper outfalls should be provided ; and here the geological structure of the country comes in the way. Ireland, as is well known, consists of a great limestone district extending over the whole centre of the island, the edges being almost everywhere upheaved by primary rocks. Many outlets are thus turned aside, and thus the central district, which occupiess two-thirds of the country, lies stagnant for want of a discharge of its waters. The limestone in the interior is

further distorted, and formed into basins, which in some cases discharge into or through each other, and in others have no discharge, but are either filled with extensive bog deposits, or, as in the counties of Mayo and Galway, form absolute lakes, called turloughs [2] (land-lakes), which occasionally, in very dry seasons, are emptied partially, and very irregularly, through subterranean channels in the cavernous limestone on which they rest.

To open these basins—to clear away obstructions in the rivers—and thus permit the free discharge of pent-up waters of the interior into the large rivers or into the sea—is therefore indispensable to the successful operation of the land improvement, and this the Government has undertaken, under authority of the Acts for arterial drainage.

A remarkable and very successful case has lately been the subject of public attention at Galway. A rain catchment-basin—*i.e.* the district bounded by the watershed line of the hills whose drainages run into it—contains the extensive lakes Mask and Corrib, which together are about thirty miles long by ten in breadth, being separated from each other only by a tongue of land three miles wide. Into this basin others open, the aggregate extent being 780,000 acres. Now, although all the waters of this enormous district were thus received into Loughs Mask and Corrib, and found their way into the sea at Galway, the connection between the two great lakes above named was by subterranean channels only. Moreover, while the discharge from Lough Corrib to the sea, distant about five miles, was for the greater part sluggish for *want* of a fall, the remainder was a rapid.

To effect the discharge of the waters of the upper into the lower lake, and of the accumulated waters of both into the sea, was the main and first object ; and yet, as if to complicate the problem, it was evidently necessary, for the purposes of navigation, to maintain sufficient water in the lakes and connecting rivers.

Now, it was found that the first object (drainage) would be sufficiently effected by keeping the lakes at the summer level the whole year round ; but that below that limit the waters could not be reduced without destroying the navigation. The calculation and arrangements for simultaneously attaining both objects were the results of long and careful observations made by the Board of Works on the fall of rain and other circumstances, and, much to the credit of that important department, the requisite works are now nearly complete.

Lough Mask will now be made to communicate with the Lower Lake by a canal passing over cavernous limestone, which, being as porous as a sponge or coral, must be stanchd or made water-tight, that it may be always full for navigation. The surplus discharge for drainage will be secured by a side cut separate from the subterranean passage above described.

On the late visit of the Lord Lieutenant (the Earl of Eglinton) to Galway, the canal between Corrib and the sea was opened by the Viceroy in person.

Loans for the arterial drainage of Ireland, as above described, have been granted to the amount of about 2,000,000*l.*

This expenditure, which is on a larger scale than individuals could defray, is made in the first instance entirely by the Board of Works, for the evident reason that it affects the interests of numerous proprietors. which could only be disinterestedly guarded by peculiar powers.

The advantages will be as follows : —

1. With respect to drainage, the upper and flooded lands of Ireland will be relieved, and

the means of thorough drainage placed within the reach of the landed proprietors.

2. In regard to navigation, the greatest lakes will become accessible from the sea and from each other.
3. Mill-power will not only be scientifically regulated and be made more constant at all seasons, but will considerably be increased.
4. Fisheries will become more profitable to capitalists, and consequently productive of increased food for man.
5. Besides the direct benefits above enumerated, the expenditure of the loan must create an industrial school of skilled labourers, and the pauper will thus be trained to improved habits, to the use of improved instruments, and to improved modes of working.

The drainage loans are to be repaid by the proprietors, on the security of the lands improved ; but when, as in the case of Lake Corrib, navigation and mill-power are combined with drainage, one-half of the cost of the project is made a free grant, and the other half charged to the county-rates.

Pointing to a hand-post we were passing, my driver said, “ That, you see, is the road to Knock.”

“ And where did you learn to read ?” I inquired.

“ At home, at my own place,” he replied.

Crossing the dark bog-coloured water of the River Fough, which runs into the adjoining Lough Corrib, we now entered the village or little town of Oughterard, at the commencement of which stands a small cottage, known as “ Martin’s Gate House,” being the commencement of the immense property formerly held by the proprietor of that name. In driving along a street containing shops and a few two-storied houses, we passed a large handsome Catholic church with a tower and entrance like a cathedral, a stone court-house of five windows in front, and a very new capacious Protestant church, in the interesting state of being enlarged. There is also at a distance a long line of military barracks for 150 men, a bridewell, and lastly an inn and post-office kept by a Mr. O’Flaherty. I here ordered a fresh horse and car, and while they were getting ready I walked a short distance to the constabulary barrack : its force was composed of a sub-inspector (absent on duty), one head constable (Roman Catholic), one acting ditto (Protestant), one mounted constable (Catholic), eight sub-constables, of whom two were Protestants and six Catholics.

The head constable, who had been at the station for four years, informed me that little or no crime was committed in the neighbourhood ; “ that the offences were trivial and very rare, and that during the last six months nothing of consequence had occurred.” As a proof of the honesty of the people of the country he added that few houses in the neighbourhood had either bolt, bar, or shutters. “ Before and during the elections,” he observed, “ there were some petty disturbances between the lower order of Catholics and Protestants, and in the month of May last there was in the village a mission of both religions, and during that time, had it not been for constant vigilance by day and by night, there would probably have been serious disturbances. Windows were broken, but now these angry feelings have almost entirely subsided.”

He also informed me that about four or five months ago a great many evictions had taken place in the neighbourhood, principally on the Martin property, 170,000 acres, lately purchased by a London Life Insurance Company ; that he had to attend at all these evictions, but that “ there was no resistance or trouble of any sort.”

“ What became of the people evicted ?” I inquired.

“ They went,” he replied, “ to the workhouse, to America, England, or wherever they could get employment.”

“ Did they commit any depredations during their distress ?” I asked.

“ They did not, *indeed*, Sir !” he replied.

“ What do you pay for your tea and sugar here ?” I inquired.

“ Very dare, Sir,” he replied. “ We pay 5*s*, for tea, 5*d*, for brown sugar, and 8*d*. for white ; that is, if we buy a single pound.”

The whole constabulary establishment was in admirable order, the men’s equipments were all shining, and the brass scales on the shoulders of the mounted constable literally shone like burnished gold.

What a moral example of cleanliness, order, and obedience, must the 1590 Constabulary Barracks offer to the people among whom they are everywhere located ! Indeed, as a pleasing proof how much this “ *Force*” is respected, I may state that it is a common practice for poor persons to come to the head constable to settle any little pecuniary disagreements between them, instead of incurring the expense of going to law.

On a slight eminence outside the village, the head constable showed me, in a field, two buildings, as white as snow, one a national, and the other a Protestant school ; he told me that about two miles off there had, moreover, been lately constructed another Protestant school.

In the market-place were a number of women, one in red tatters that completely defied description.

I also observed there several pigs in tandem form ; that is to say, their owners were driving them in pairs, each couple being matrimonially tied together by a long straw band, but during certain paroxysms that occasionally occur in all descriptions of wedlock, which was leader, and which was wheeler, it was sometimes for a moment or two exceedingly difficult correctly to declare.

From the market I went to the workhouse, a very large, new building, hardly completed. In it were 795 poor, of whom there were very few men that could really be termed able-bodied. The general appearance of the various classes was very nearly what I have already repeatedly described. By the master I was informed that on the 1st of January last the number of inmates was 972, but that on the 29th of June he had, in consequence of evictions, no less than 1475, of whom 680 had since emigrated or managed to find employment. Of the amount of outdoor relief administered by the Board of Guardians of the Union the master could give me no information whatever.

Previous to the passing of the Poor Law Act in 1839, there was no legal provision for the poor in Ireland ; and, indeed, that Act strictly confined relief to the walls of the workhouse in which the infirm, aged, and destitute were to be received. In consequence of the famine, outdoor relief, which it was necessary to legalise by the extension Act of 1847, was administered, in the first instance, by a gigantic system of what were misnamed “ Public Works.”

At this labour, often nearly useless, the poor in winter suffered severely, and, as there was no food in many parts of the country, money-wages soon became comparatively useless. The system, therefore, was succeeded by one of direct relief, for the legalization of which there was passed a new Act that still continues, and which, in fact, forms the present Poor Law of Ireland, the expenditure and relief of which has, since 1840, been as follows : —

Year.	No. of Unions.	Expenditure.	No. of Paupers.
1840	4	£ 37, 057	10,910
1841	37	110, 278	31,108
1846	129	435, 001	243, 933
1847	130	803, 686	417, 139
1848	131	1, 835, 634	610, 463
1849	131	2, 177, 651	932, 284
1850	163	1, 430, 108	805, 702
1851	163	1, 110, 892	708, 450

The numbers relieved under the Poor Law system in 1848 and 1849 were 1,433,042 and 1,210,482. Throughout the whole of Ireland there are now 163 Poor Law unions, comprehending 3439 electoral divisions.

I now returned to the inn, where I found waiting for me a car that had once been black, a new driver in a hat that appeared to have been severely crunched, and a little, lean, wiry, thoroughbred pony, wearing a straw collar, a bridle with only one winker, and a belly-band loose enough to have admitted a child's body. On assuming my seat, with my eyes as usual exactly at right angles to the line of draught, I was accosted by two or three beggars.— “ Dis yere Arnh'r want a lobster,” exclaimed to me a very fine-looking woman of about thirty, “ beautiful, jumping, and alive ?”— and as there was nothing in their appearance or language that happened to strike my fancy, I said to the driver, “ Now then, my man !” At the little horse's head I had observed a man standing, apparently as if to prevent his starting forward too hastily. I soon found, however, that it was diametrically for the opposite purpose, for as soon as the little creature received a slight touch with the whip, instead of taking me, as I desired, eastward, he began to back due west. Off jumped the driver, and, with his round, red face towards the Occident, he pulled at the bridle with all his force, and, in an instant, the car was surrounded by men, women—lobster included—and children, all of whom had either something to exclaim, or something to prescribe. In the centre of the joyful group, for everybody looked delighted, I sat, like Patience on a monument, smiling, not so much at Grief as at the eager, earnest, prescribing faces that surrounded me. What happened to the wiry little horse I can hardly say, as so many folks. all at the same time, were pinching, poking, or violently abusing him ; however, all of a sudden the dose, whatever it was, became at last more than he could bear ; accordingly he plunged forwards, and then, as if he wanted to run away, proceeded at such a pace that I feared the driver would let go the reins. He, however, managed to jump on the low seat at my back, and then, gradually slackening the little animal's impetuous career, we soon sobered down to a steady trot.

“ He’s a little tinder, yere Arn’r !” which I afterwards ascertained to mean that he had an exceedingly sore shoulder ; however, when once he was off, his spirit was so great and so good, that he apparently cared nothing at all about it.

On our left was apparently the sea. It was, however, Lough Corrib, in length rather greater than the distance between Dover and Calais.

“ There are 366 islinds on ut, yere Arn’r !” said my driver, pointing at this noble expanse of water with a whip not worth three-halfpence. “ There’s an islind over for ivery day in the year !”

In about a mile and a half we came to fine large fields of wheat, oats, barley, and of green crops, in the centre of which stood an extensive English-looking farm-yard and buildings, belonging to Mr. O’Flaherty—the whole enclosed by new substantial stone walls. On the left were the ruins of the Castle of Aghnanure, in feudal times the residence of the chief O’Flaherty, among which survives a yew-tree, said to be more than a thousand years old.

At this point the driver descended from the car, and, begging me to follow him, we left our impetuous little horse on the road entirely by himself, and proceeded some distance on our left to a natural bridge, composed of a stratum of limestone, under which a considerable stream was rushing. On one side I observed a mass of rich-coloured bog-water rapidly but calmly approaching what appeared to be an impenetrable wall of solid rock ; on the other side I beheld it escaping out of utter darkness, head over heels, frightened, apparently, almost into fits at the unusual, strange, and unaccountable catastrophe that had befallen it.

“ Very honest papple here, yere Arn’r !” said my driver, as, on our return to the car, he pointed to my umbrella, carpet-bag, and blanket-poncho, all remaining in it exactly as we had left them. On resuming my seat, I own I expected once again, against my will, to migrate towards the Far West, but the sensible little horse knew that—between two mangers—he had better proceed, and so off he trotted.

“ How many children are there at your school ?” I inquired of a little girl, who, with a book in her hand, had for some time been running close to me.

“ Och ! there’s a large lot of ’um !” she replied.

“ But how *many*, ?” I repeated.

“ Sure ! I couldn’t count ’um, yere Arn’r !” was the answer.

We now passed a woman in a red petticoat and plaid, heavily laden with a creel or basket of peat, lying diagonally along her back.

“ The women are graight slaves in this counthry, yere Arn’r : they carry loads as would do for horses. They do well in *Ameriky*.”

“ Do many of them go there ?” I inquired.

“ A grate dale !” he replied.

“ Which do they like best ?” I asked, “ England or America ?”

“ Those,” he answered, “ that havn’t got the manes must go to England to earn ’um.”

“ Fine turf this,” I observed, pointing to a quantity piled in black heaps, about 100 yards off.

“ Och !” he replied, with an arch smile, “there’s plenty o’ turf and water in Ireland. Ireland ’s a fine counthry, but the warnt of pitatur and the poor-rate are ruining ut. A marn with a long family can’t get on at a’ ; pitatur are the things to support a counthry !”

At three miles and a half from Oughterard we came to a fine plantation of fir, oak, larch, and beech, enclosed with a stone wall cemented by lime, extending more than a mile and a half, with handsome iron entrance-gates, belonging to Mr. Martin, of Ross (a Protestant), whose park appeared quite equal to anything of the sort in England. Around it were fields of turnips, oats, barley, wheat, and here and there, as the memorial of a departed system, an unroofed cabin. On the right the vale was bounded by heather hills.

“ That’s the latter ind of Mr. Martin of Ross’s istate, yere Arn’r,” said my driver, pointing to an angle in the high wall on our left; “ and now here’s the commincement o’ the phroperty of Mr. Anthony O’Flaherty (a Roman Catholic) of Knockbane.”

At this point we met one of Bianconi’s (usually, in Ireland, called Biancony) jovial and well-appointed cars, on one side of which sat very comfortably together, like a couple of hooded crows on a rail, two fine, ruddy, powerful-looking priests ; next to them were two English tourist ladies ; then, of course, two tourist young gentlemen ; and, on the opposite bench, dos-à-dos to priests, ladies, and Co., half-a-dozen more of her Majesty’s subjects, all evidently in search of the picturesque.

“ What a pity it is,” said I to my driver, thinking, as it were, aloud, “ that Catholics and Protestants in Ireland can’t pull together !”

“ There should be no arnimosity ’atween ’um,” said the clerk at my back in amen reply to the extempore sermon I had just preached to him ; “ ivery man ought to go his own way paceably till the day of judgmint.”

[1] They could purchase them, he said, at Oughterard, but at exorbitant prices.

[2] From TIR, *land* ; and LOUGH, *lake*.

A fortnight in Ireland (1852)

Author: Head, Francis Bond, Sir, 1793-1875

Subject: Ireland — Description and travel; Ireland — Politics and government 19th century

Publisher: London : J. Murray

Language: English

Digitizing sponsor: MSN

Book contributor: University of California Libraries

Collection: cdl; americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/fortnightinirela00headrich>

Edited and uploaded to [www.aughty.org](http://www.aughty.org)

October 10 2011