

In search of Scenery

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

Henry David Inglis

1834

•

Country between Roundstone and Clifden—Clifden —Cunnemara Salmon—Advice to Travellers—Trade of Clifden—Clifden Castle—Cultivation of Bogs—landowners of Cunnemara—Road to Leenane—Morning Pictures—Digression on Irish Hospitality—Character of this part of Cunnemara—Land-holders—The Killeries—Magnificent Scenery—Delphi—Leenane, and Jack Joyce—A Hint to Travellers.

I NOW left Roundstone for Clifden, which lies about ten miles to the north-west. The road to Clifden skirts that singular country of lakes which I saw from the summit of Urrisbeg mountain, and gives the traveller the opportunity of a nearer observation of it. It is an entirely unpeopled, and most desolate-looking tract ; ranging the eye over the whole extent of it, not a habitation is to be seen, nor a living creature of any kind—nothing but a vast flat of brown heathy land, with innumerable lakes of all dimensions and forms gleaming in every direction. Some of these lakes lay close to the road ; many of them, as my telescope had already shown me, encircled wooded islands ; and I was near enough to see, that a considerable portion of the wood was yew.

As I approached Clifden, the country began to improve : a few cottages skirted the road, and some little cultivation surrounded the cottages ; and close upon Clifden the scenery becomes agreeable and picturesque. Nothing, indeed, can be prettier than the situation of Clifden, at the head of the deep narrow inlet of the sea, above which it stands, and with a splendid amphitheatre of mountains half surrounding it.

Clifden is only fourteen years old, and is a wonderful place for its age. Fifteen years ago not a house was built : now it reckons upwards of a hundred good slated, and perhaps half as many thatched, houses. Nor is it a mere straggling congregation of houses ; there are three streets—two of them good streets—and many respectable-looking shops. There is also a church, a chapel, a fever hospital ; a school-house—not yet completed, intended to be under the new board,—and another unfinished school-house, which was begun when proselytism was in vogue. There is also a wonderfully good inn, for so remote a place, where, notwithstanding the claims of the Blackwater, I think I may promise the traveller as prime a salmon as ever swam.

Cunnemara is the country of salmon : every inlet and river is full of them ; and this is the staple of every dinner in every inn in this part of Ireland. Variety in the mode of preparing the salmon, stands instead of other variety. Salmon boiled, salmon roasted, and salmon pickled, are produced successively, in place of fish, flesh, and fowl : but I would take the liberty of advising the hungry traveller to be cautious. Salmon at no time, and in no shape, is considered a very wholesome food ; but it is the opinion of persons wiser in these matters than I am, that salmon, eaten perfectly fresh out of the water, as it is always eaten in the west of Ireland, is much more indigestible than when it has been some time kept. There is nothing, I believe, unphilosophical in this opinion. I have eaten salmon in Cunnemara, an hour or two out of the water, which has required as vigorous an exercise of the masticating powers as old poultry, or new-killed mutton. And as I am on the subject of inns, and bills of fare, I would advise the traveller in Cunnemara, after he has partaken moderately of the never-failing salmon, to make bacon the staple of his dinner. Fowls, over the greater part of Ireland, are un-

eatable ; but the bacon is generally good ; and with eggs, and excellent potatoes,—the first course of them boiled, the second crisped,—and with good bread, and excellent butter, a traveller may get through the agreeable business of dining as comfortably as a traveller in Cunnemara has any right to expect. I must add that the abundance and cheapness of salmon, which is generally about threepence per lb., make little difference in the charges at the inns. Considering the fare, I think charges higher here than in most parts of Ireland. The whole dinner of salmon, bacon, and potatoes, cannot cost the innkeeper sixpence ; and the traveller is probably charged 1*s.* 6*d.*, 1*s.* 8*d.*, or 2*s.* : and in Limerick, or any other town, he is charged 2*s.* 6*d.* or 3*s.* for a good dinner. The great inns, with their high rents, and other expenses, are decidedly moderate in their charges. But to return from this digression.

Clifden has a considerable export trade in oats, and a rapidly increasing trade. It was thought, that the export of oats, for the year 1834, would reach a thousand tons. I noticed one large corn-store newly built, and another in course of building. There is also some export of kelp from Clifden ; but it is now very trifling. There can be no doubt that the decline of the kelp trade has been of service to Cunnemara, by encouraging the employment of sea-weed in agriculture, which would certainly not have been the case, if there had been a market for it. Clifden also enjoys a pretty good retail trade, considering the yet limited extent of the town, and the scanty population of the surrounding district. I saw no shop unoccupied ; and I was told, that many of the tradespeople are in comfortable circumstances.

Mr. D'Arcy, of Clifden Castle, has the merit of having founded this town, and of having made it what it is : and yet it has never cost him a shilling. He pointed out the advantages which would accrue to this remote neighbourhood from having a town, and a sea-port so situated ; and he offered leases for ever of a plot of ground for building, together with four acres of mountain land, at but a short distance from the proposed site of the town, at 25*s.* per annum. This offer was most advantageous, even leaving out of account the benefit which would necessarily be conferred by a town on a district where the common necessaries of life had to be purchased thirty miles distant ; and where there was no market, and no means of export for agricultural produce : and so the town of Clifden was founded, and grew.

It says little, however, for the industry of the people, that the greater part of the mountain land so granted, and so cheaply held, yet remains in its primitive state ; though it is perfectly susceptible of cultivation, at but small cost of either money or labour. When mountain land is spoken of, this does not mean very elevated ground, but it applies to any land not brought under cultivation. Nowhere is the facility of improving certain descriptions of bog-land more plainly seen than in this neighbourhood. Grass, potatoes, oats, and rye, are all seen growing luxuriantly on land that a very few years ago was used only for turf-cutting. The usual practice is to spread sea-weed on bog-land, and at the same time to put in potatoes, and trench the land ; and the first year's crop even leaves a profit over the expense of leading the manure, and of labour. Roads and ports are alone wanted to convert Cunnemara, at no distant period, into a fruitful corn district.

Clifden does not afford constant employment for all who desire it. A new place is apt to attract a superabundance of labour for a time ; and this has been in some degree the case with Clifden.

The marble quarries of Cunnemara afford but little employment. Indeed, they can scarcely be said to be worked at all. Owing to the peculiarities of the marble, and the danger of destroying it in the operation of sawing, it does not find a ready market in England ; but it is probable, that the establishment of a saw-mill at Clifden, and the export of slabs, would be a remunerating investment of capital.

Let no traveller be in this neighbourhood, without visiting Clifden Castle, the delightful residence of Mr. D'Arcy. The walk from Clifden, by the water side, is perfectly lovely ; and

the distance is not greater than two miles. The path runs close by the brink of a narrow inlet of the sea, the banks of which, on both sides, are ragged and precipitous. It was an evening of extraordinary beauty when I sauntered down the path ; the tide was full, and the inlet brimful and calm ; and beyond the narrow entrance of the bay lay, in almost as glassy a calm, though with a gentle heaving, the wide waters of the Atlantic. After reaching the entrance of the bay, and rounding a little promontory, Clifden Castle comes into view. It is a modern castellated house ; not remarkable in itself ; but in point of situation unrivalled. Mountain and wood rose behind : and a fine sloping lawn in front reaches down to the beautiful land-locked bay ; while to the right, the eye ranges over the ocean, until it mingles with the far and dim horizon.

Twenty years ago, the whole of this was a bog ; and now not a rood of bog-land is to be seen. The lawn I saw laden with a magnificent crop of hay ; while at the same time, the sunk-fence showed a deep bog. I returned to Clifden by the mountain road, and was again delighted with the new views which the road discloses,—more Swiss in character than anything I had seen in Ireland. The mountain range behind Clifden—the Twelve Pins of Bunarola—is almost worthy of Switzerland. In its outline, nothing can be finer. Altogether, I was greatly pleased with Clifden : and I think I may safely risk a prophecy, that this town will rapidly rise into importance. Should Cunnemara ever be generally brought into cultivation, which I confidently anticipate, it is from this neighbourhood that the produce of the western part of Cunnemara must be exported.

Cunnemara is almost all shared amongst large proprietors ; the five greatest of whom are, Mr. Martin, Mr. D'Arcy, Mr. Blake, Mr. Lynch, and Mr. O'Neill. The estates of all these individuals are extensive : but Mr. Martin is greatly the largest proprietor, and has considerably the largest rent-roll. I found nothing in the neighbourhood of Clifden, to weaken the impression on my mind, that the landholders of these mountain districts are better circumstanced than the same class of individuals in the fertile and more peopled parts of Ireland.

My route now lay from Clifden to Leenane, or as it is more currently called, “ Jack Joyce's.” This road, after skirting the western base of the Twelve Pins, on the one side, and the sea bays on the other, strikes through the heart of Cunnemara, and amongst the mountains, into Joyce's country—for Leenane is not in Cunnemara, but in Joyce's country. As I intended, at Leenane, again to have recourse to cars (for there, one gets into the carriage-road to Westport), and as no cars were to be had at Leenane, I hired a car at Clifden to precede me.

I do not hesitate for a moment to say, that the scenery in passing from Clifden to the Killeries and Leenane is the finest in Ireland. In boldness of character, nothing at Killarney comes at all near to it ; and although the deficiency of wood excludes the possibility of a competition with Killarney in picturesque beauty, I am certainly of opinion, that the scenery of this part of Cunnemara, including especially the Killeries, which is in Joyce's country, is entitled to rank higher than the most praised, because better known, scenery of Killarney. I would not be understood as saying one word in disparagement of Killarney, which, in the combination of form and colour, is not to be surpassed : but in speaking of Killarney, I think I ventured to observe, that no approach to sublimity was to be found ; and as, in the part of Ireland of which I am now speaking, there are undoubted approaches to the sublime, with all of the picturesque besides that depends upon form, I think these ought to weigh heavier in the balance than that softened beauty, which at Killarney is created by abundance and variety of wood, and consequent splendour of colouring. I know that a far stronger impression was made on my mind in this Journey, than by anything I saw at Killarney. Be it known too, that this is a country of lakes,—lakes, with as fine mountain boundaries, as are to be found in the three kingdoms. But it is time I should proceed on my journey.

The first six or seven miles after leaving Clifden, the road lies through a peopled country, though not thickly peopled. The scenery is of the most varied and attractive character : one has glimpses of a hundred beautiful and striking scenes on land and sea,—climbing up high

steeps, and then descending into deep valleys ; skirting and rounding deep inlets of the sea ; and still, calm, fresh-water lakes ; and now and then catching peeps into the long solitary valleys, and deep hollows, that lie in the heart of the mountains. I left Clifden soon after five o'clock ; and a calmer or more delightful morning never brightened before the traveller. Morning has this advantage over evening,—that when the calm of evening comes on, and shadows lengthen, and sunbeams grow brighter, the sounds of day continue : nay, evening is the time for play and frolic ; and the silence of evening is more poetical than real. But at early sunrise, the repose of night is yet upon the earth ; and the calm of the early morning is more perfect and unbroken than that of evening : the lake is still ; but there is no pleasure party, with laugh and jest, making for the shore : the sea breaks as gently on the beach ; but no idlers are sauntering, or children playing there. The mountain sides are as bright, and their hollows as dim ; but the cattle have not yet raised their heads, and are moveless as the rocks above them. Morning, therefore, is the hour of greater repose ; and on the morning I left Clifden, all was as I have sketched it.

About seven miles from Clifden, the road to Leenane and the Killery—a new line of road, though not yet completed—turns to the right, leaving on the left the road to that extreme western point where the property of Mr. Blake lies. The family of Mr. Blake are authors of that agreeable book, called “ Letters from the Irish Highlands ;” and I regretted that my letter of introduction to the family did not reach me before my departure from England, but found me at Belfast on my return. Although I well know that Irish hospitality makes a traveller and a stranger welcome, I make it a rule, to present myself to no one of a certain rank without a letter of introduction. And here I will take the opportunity of making a short digression on Irish hospitality. I am of opinion, that Irish hospitality, in the sense in which it was once understood, does not now exist to any great extent. It was an evil ; and cured itself. Wholesale hospitality, and prodigality, are near akin ; and the gentry of Ireland are not now generally in a condition, in which prudence would sanction that kind of hospitality.

The attentions and hospitality of good society in Ireland are to be found in Ireland, as they are in other countries,—through the medium of good letters of introduction. These, I believe, will secure civilities in England and Scotland, as well as in Ireland ; and will produce their fruits, according to the source whence they come ; and I do not believe, that, without these, great progress is made in Ireland, more than in other parts of the empire. There is, indeed, a warm-heartedness about the Irish in the south and west, that if a person well introduced be an agreeable person, will exhibit itself in extraordinary attentions : still, I must contend, that in Ireland the hospitalities of the upper classes must be preceded, as they ought to be, by creditable introductions. No doubt, an Irish gentleman in a remote part, where there is no public accommodation, would receive and welcome a traveller ; but so any gentleman would, in any remote part of the empire ; and I have been myself occasionally so received, in almost every country in Europe. Those, of the many to whose hospitality in Ireland I have been indebted, who may chance to read these pages, well know, that I have every reason to speak highly of Irish hospitality ; and so I do : I only wish to correct an impression, that Irish hospitality is everywhere a passport to the stranger ; and to say that, although Irish hospitality would forbid the door to be closed against a stranger, yet those attentions which render the journey of a traveller agreeable are due, in the first place, to the introductions which he carries with him.

I left the reader at the point where the road to Leenane turns to the right. For many miles I travelled through a succession of most striking scenery, by the margin of lakes lying in the very heart of the mountains, which are in many places precipitous,—everywhere of the most picturesque forms ; here and there lofty enough, and rugged enough, to verge upon sublimity ;—and which never degenerate into tameness of outline, or insignificance in elevation. The scenes were generally of a solitary character ; for few cattle or sheep were on the mountain sides ; the curlew and the plover only were on the margin of the lakes ; and the *bouquet* of heaths was reserved for the wild bee.

After travelling seven or eight miles on this interesting road, I reached one or two houses ; and took advantage of the opportunity to make a halt. The interior of the house was poor enough, and deficient in almost every article of comfort. I counted eleven cows, however, outside of the house ; with many pigs, and all kinds of fowl ; and several sides of bacon were hanging from the roof. This, I had very rarely seen in Ireland : and it certainly bespoke a very favourable condition. Nor were the cows all the stock these people possessed ; they fed a considerable herd of cattle on the mountain ; but I could not learn how many : and for the land which supported all this stock, they paid 3*l.* 7*s.* Yet these people complained of the high rent, and of their poverty. I think I cannot be accused of a disposition to make the condition of the Irish poor appear better than it is, or to extol the generosity of landlords. God knows the condition of the Irish poor is bad enough ; and it is but little they owe, in general, to the owners of the soil ; but I wish to represent the truth, and do justice to all. There is a disposition among the Irish farmers to complain under all circumstances ; and although in the great majority of cases they may justly complain of high rents, I never heard one individual admit that his rent was low. I would not always judge of the condition of an Irish farmer solely by the way in which he lives ; because some live like paupers, who might live in greater comfort ; but if I see sides of bacon hanging in the kitchen, and four or five children drinking new milk, and eating potatoes and butter, I may conclude that it is not necessary to send either the pigs or the butter to market, in order to pay the rent. I sincerely wish that all the farmers in Ireland could afford to do the like. I noticed several acres in the neighbourhood of the cabin at which I stopped under tillage ; and I drank some excellent potheen from the family still.

After quitting this halting place, the road diverged from the range of mountains through which I had been passing ; but in leaving them, their forms, and outline, and glens, and shadows, were only the better revealed ; and before me another, and seemingly equally elevated, mountain range extended to the right. These were the mountains which border the Killeries, and which lie in Joyce's country, part of which, as well as Cunnemara, is in Galway, and part in the county Mayo. I had already indeed been some time in Joyce's country. The limits between Cunnemara and Joyce's country are not, I believe, very distinctly marked : but at the house where I lately made a halt, I was told I was then in Joyce's country.

After passing through a somewhat more open country, I suddenly dropped down upon the Killery. The Killery is a narrow deep inlet of the sea, reaching far up into the country, and bounded on both sides, and throughout its whole extent, by a range of mountains nearly as elevated, and of as picturesque forms, as any in Ireland. It may easily be conceived how great the attractions of this scene must be. It is of an entirely novel character ; and resembles more the scenery of a Norwegian Fiord, than any thing I know nearer home. The inlet is not above an English mile across ; several parts of the mountain boundary rise abruptly from the water ; but there are here and there clefts and hollows, which discover more elevated peaks beyond. and show the breadth and extent of the range. There is no scene in England of the same character as the Killery ; nor another in Ireland either, on so grand a scale. If the mountain sides on the Killery were wooded, it must be almost unnecessary to travel into Norway in search of scenery.

I knew that on the opposite side of the Killery, in Mayo, the Marquis of Sligo owned a spot, called Delphi, which enjoyed a high reputation for beauty of situation ; and seeing, as I walked along the road which skirts the water, a little boat just putting off, at but a short distance from me, I hailed it, and bargained to be taken across, to the point nearest to Lord Sligo's lodge ; and that the boat should wait my return, and then take me up to the head of the Killery, where stands the house of reception owned by Jack Joyce, This was precisely one of those occasions when a man may congratulate himself on being free from all incumbrances. To be rowed across the Killery, and then carried up to the Killery head, in this convenient mode, required that one should have neither horse nor vehicle of any kind.

A short half hour was sufficient to put me across ; and stepping ashore, in a little cove, opposite to a wide mountain hollow, I followed the path which was pointed out to me. About a mile from the shore, I reached the entrance to the mountain hollow ; and another mile, into the heart of it, brought me to the neighbourhood of Delphi. The lodge itself is not any way remarkable ; but its situation is. It lies in a deep recess among the mountains, which rise lofty and abrupt on all sides, excepting one, where there is a little lake, along whose margin winds the road to the house. The immediate neighbourhood of the house is well wooded, and abundance of sweet-smelling flowers make an odorous atmosphere around. It is certainly a tranquil and singular spot—an Elysium to many ; but not likely, I should think, to suit well the taste and habits of the noble owner. There is a road from this side of the Killery to Westport ; and, judging by the appearance of the mountains beyond, I should think it must be an interesting one. Expecting a car, however, to be in waiting for me at Leenane, I was true to my bargain with the boatmen, who had taken advantage of my hour-and-a-halfs absence to spread their nets and ensnare a fine salmon, and were making towards the shore when I reached it. It was a delightful hour—that which was occupied in rowing up the Killery. It is from the water only that scenery of this kind is seen in perfection. A blue sky—a perfect calm—mild air—and magnificent scenery—united in furnishing forth a banquet of enjoyment ; and I reached the house of *Jack Joyce*, fully disposed to be pleased with whatever the help-mate of this renowned person should set before me.

This is one of the most noted spots in these wilds ; and the owner one of the most noted persons. The Joyces, I have already said, are a large race ; but Jack Joyce is huge, even among *them*. He is as near akin to a giant as a man can well be, without being every bit a giant. In breadth height, muscle, and general aspect, he is like a man—if not of another race—the descendant of another race. Jack Joyce looks upon himself as the greatest man for many a mile round ; as a sort of king of that country—Joyce’s country—as indeed he is. King Dan is a very inferior person to him there. But, beware reader ! and address this individual in some phraseology more respectful than by the name he commonly bears. The salutation “ How are you Jack ? ” or “ Jack Joyce, my fine fellow how do you do ? ” might be followed by an uncourteous reception. “ Mr. Joyce, I am delighted to make the acquaintance of the representative of all the Joyces ; ” or, “ Have I the pleasure of seeing before me Mr. Joyce, to whose ancestors this country once belonged ? ” would be salutations more likely to ensure a good reception. And, besides. Jack Joyce is really worth conversing with : he is a shrewd, intelligent, plain-spoken man ; but not, of course, inclined to favour with his conversation those who do not pay him the respect to which he thinks himself entitled. For my part, I could not have addressed a king of one of the South-sea islands with more respect ; and I found my advantage in it : the head of the Joyces was most courteous and communicative ; and the mistress of the house, perceiving the favourable reception of the guest, strove to do her part. Here, however, the will was better than the deed. I was still in the heart of the salmon country. No place indeed is more famous for salmon than this same spot ; and accordingly, salmon, in all its varieties, was set before me—as much of it as would have dined a score persons of ordinary dimensions and appetite, with a pyramid of potatoes in the middle, in perfect keeping with the enormous dishes by which it was flanked. Room was also found on the table for a double-sized bottle of whiskey ; water appeared to be a beverage not much in repute there.

I purposed going forward to Westport that evening, and, indeed, actually set out ; but I changed my mind. It would have been dark before I could have reached Westport ; and I do not approve of passing through a strange country in the dark. Do not suppose I mean to question the security of travelling in these parts. I mean only to question the propriety of passing, in the dark, through a country which one wishes to see. The traveller need be under no apprehension in any part of Ireland. Irish outrages are never committed upon strangers ; and however strong the disposition may be, among the peasantry of Ireland, to oppose the law, and screen delinquents, I do not believe an outrage, committed on a stranger and a traveller, would receive anything but condemnation from all classes.

A two or three hours' ramble among the mountains spent the evening much to my mind. It was as splendid an evening as it had been a day. Every mountain top was dear ; and from some neighbouring heights, all the Mayo mountains were placed in magnificent amphitheatre before me,—the celebrated “ Reek” in the midst of them, raising its cone, sharp and dear, above them all. An hour's chat with the Joyce, and the accompaniment of a glass of whiskey and water, finished the day ; and notwithstanding that the wayfarer's bedroom in the house of *Jack Joyce* had not much to boast of over the accommodation of Mr. Flynn, at the halfway house, fatigue kindly rendered me insensible to all annoyances.

.

Journey to Westport—Westport—The Hotel—the Linen Trade of Westport—Land and Rents in this District—Exports of Westport—Market Day—Proofs of Poverty—Ridiculous Pride of the People of Mayo—Lord Sligo—Landlords and their Tenants—Priests and Agitators—Lord Sligo's Domain—The Petty Sessions at Westport—The “ Reek”— Achill Island, and the Mullet—Road to Castlebar—Cabins and their Inmates—Going to Harvest—Castlebar and its Trade—The late Reduction of Duty on Irish Spirits, and its probable Effects.

At an early hour I left Leenane, for Westport. I had now dropped pedestrianism, and travelled by a car, along a smooth and somewhat hilly road, with an exceedingly pleasant country on either side. It was still a mountain country ; but cultivation was beginning to be seen here and there ; patches of corn, and of potatoes, were scattered along the edges of the bogs ; and the whole district showed symptoms of a dawning improvement, needing but enterprise, the security of capital, and good inland communications, in order to mature it. All the way to Westport, the mountain ranges are seen to great advantage ; the “ Reek,” or “ Crow Patrick,” still conspicuous among them all.

I had intended to have reached Westport to a late breakfast ; but hunger assailed me by the way ; and as it was necessary to bait the horse, I took advantage of the halt, to get some oat cake, milk, and eggs, in a neighbouring house. It was not an inn : but I was made welcome. The inmates, who held their land under Lord Sligo, were small farmers, possessing as much land (in the lump, as they call it) as fed forty head of cattle, five cows, and a few horses ; and the rent was thirty shillings. The lease, however, was an old one. I make this remark, because the low rent I have mentioned might otherwise lead to the supposition, that the Marquis of Sligo's land is remarkably low let, which is not generally the case. The people with whom I breakfasted were as comfortable as the ideas and habits of the people permit any small land occupier in Ireland to be. They consumed their own milk and butter, and raised enough of corn to pay the rent, and to afford oaten bread and potheen besides.

As I approached Westport, the country greatly improved in cultivation. More cattle, too, were seen on the hill sides ; wood began to assume a respectable growth ; and the cottages became frequent. Some time before reaching the town, the fine bay, with its many islands, were seen on the left,—the majestic “ Reek” rising directly from its shore ; and after a very agreeable drive of four hours, I was set down at the door of Robinson's Hotel,—the very best hotel in Ireland, without excepting even “ the Imperial” of Cork. It is singular that such an hotel should be found in a town in the extreme west of the remote county of Mayo. I cannot account for this ; I only know the fact ; and can assure the reader, that he will not find at Gresham's in Dublin,—scarcely even in the Clarendon, a more *recherché* dinner than Mrs. Robinson will put before him. It is true, indeed, he will pay something more for his dinner, as well as for his bed-room, than in more ordinary places ; but for my part, I was well content to do this, after a fortnight's Lent, and Jack Joyce's bed-room.

Westport is rather a nice-looking town. It boasts of more than one good street : and in the middle of the town there is a mall, with a pretty stream running in the centre of it, and with rows of fine trees on either side. The gate opening into Lord Sligo's park is at one end of the

mall ; and the houses which line both sides are respectable. The hotel occupies a large portion on one side.

Westport was once a very flourishing town. The linen trade was extensively carried on there ; and eight years ago, as many as nine hundred pieces were measured and sold on a market day. Now the quantity scarcely averages one hundred pieces. Taking the whole district, including Westport, Castlebar, Newport Pratt, and Balinrobe, and the intermediate country, about five hundred pieces are sold weekly ; and about 30,000 persons are supposed to be, less or more, employed in the trade. No trade gives such universal employment as this : not fewer than sixty persons are employed, from first to last, in preparing a web of linen.

The linen trade in this district, and most probably in other districts, is the source of all the extras which are obtained beyond the absolute necessities of life. The land is let in very small portions ; seven or eight acres is about the usual size of a “ take.” Potatoes are raised for the family consumption ; grain, to pay the rent ; and the flax is destined for clothing and extras. The decline of the linen trade has produced great want of employment ; and the condition of the agriculturists throughout these districts has very much deteriorated. Many much smaller landholders than those I have mentioned were attracted by the linen trade ; and now, therefore, the want of employment is the more felt. A man with three children could formerly earn 10s. a week with ease. Land is generally sufficiently high let in this neighbourhood, except the old takes, which are low. I found a man occupying three acres in the immediate neighbourhood of the town, and paying only 4*l.* for the whole. He told me he had married five daughters, and had given four cows to each, as a marriage portion. The poverty of the county of Mayo is chiefly found in the lower parts of it : not so much in the mountainous districts. In these the people are circumstanced much the same as in Cunnemara. Westport possesses a considerable export trade in grain.

About 15,000 tons are exported,—of which the largest portion is oats ; the next barley : and the smallest portion, wheat. There are extensive corn stores on the quay : and the harbour is good and secure.

The day after my arrival in Westport chanced to be market day. The town had an appearance of considerable business : but, with the exception of manufactured linen, this appearance was deceptive. It is true, there were many people in the market, and much buying and selling ; but the articles brought to market were, in most cases, of very trifling value. I saw hundreds of women, standing with but a couple of hanks of linen yarn, worth a shilling or two ; hundreds, with an apron full of wool, worth much less. Some of these bundles of wool, indeed, were the shearings of one or two sheep, the exclusive property of the farmer’s wife or daughter, and were sent to be converted into ribands or gloves ; but notwithstanding these exceptions, it is certain that there is much evidence of the poverty of the surrounding country, in the small value of the articles brought to market, and in the great distance which they are carried. I know of three, two, and even one egg, being brought to Westport from a distance of two miles. I saw a girl take her seat in the market with five eggs, worth one penny halfpenny ; and she had walked an Irish mile and a half to bring them to market.

It is a singular fact, however, that along with this poverty, and this necessity, the most absurd pride should prevail among the country people. They have an objection to bring to market, or offer for sale, anything which might be supposed to be consumed at home. One does not see in a West of Ireland market the wholesome spectacle of a row of farmers’ wives and daughters, with their baskets of butter, and their hens and ducks cackling at their feet. The Irish landholder’s wife is above this. If necessity compels her, as it generally does, to dispose of her poultry, she does it by stealth, and offers them as if they were not fairly come by. They carry the chickens under their cloaks, and generally get within the door before uncovering their goods. I have myself heard a woman, who offered two chickens for sale, open the negotiation by assigning some particular reason for the step. This ridicul-

ous pride I have found in other parts of Ireland ; but nowhere to so great an extent as in the county of Mayo.

The absence of Lord Sligo from Westport cannot be otherwise than a serious loss ; and of this the inhabitants are fully sensible. I heard nothing to Lord Sligo's prejudice, excepting, that like many other Irish noblemen and gentlemen, he was disgusted with what he considered the ingratitude of the people of Westport and its neighbourhood ; and had withdrawn his countenance and favour from the town and its inhabitants, long before he left the country for Jamaica. In this course, he, and all others who have so acted, were wrong. Supposing it to be ingratitude to oust any noble family from the political position it has held in a county (and this is only supposition, since it depends altogether upon the character and conduct of the family), the ignorant, and the misguided, are punished by the landlord, for being ignorant and misguided,—which is evidently unjust. Good and bad men have alike been driven from the representation of counties and boroughs in Ireland, by agitation : but in all cases in which the people were wrong, as well as in those where they were right, they were originally mere tools in the hands of the resident working agitators,—the priests,—who were themselves tools in the hands of the absentee master agitator. Some change has now taken place in this. O'Connell does not work now so much through the medium of the priests as directly upon the people, by epistles and speeches ; and my persuasion is, that the fiats of O'Connell would be obeyed, even if the priesthood opposed them. I believe it frequently happens now, and will happen still more frequently, that it is the priest who, through self-interest, finds it necessary to move with the people,—not the people who are incited to agitation by the priest. This, I know to be the opinion of several of the more respectable Catholic dignitaries, who are opposed to O'Connell and agitation.

The domain of Lord Sligo, at Westport, is small, but wonderfully beautiful ; partly by the gifts of nature, but more by the operations of art. The house stands charmingly, at the head of a little artificial lake, which is separated by an embankment from the sea, that at high water rises almost to a level with the lake. The view from the windows of the house is beautiful. Abundance of fine timber is scattered over the domain, particularly ash ; and the disposition of the wood is worthy of its great variety and fine growth.

I attended a petty sessions at Westport ; and found a good deal to interest me. The classes of cases were the same as I had already seen elsewhere ; but there was some little difference in the character of the assault cases, which were of a less barbarous kind than those which I had seen tried at the Tralee sessions. Here also were more cases of larceny, which had been very rare farther south. I found at Westport the same contempt of truth, the same disregard of an oath, the same clanship, as I had found elsewhere. Most of the cases tried originated in the competition for, or possession of, land. Many were cases of trespass ; many, cases in which the driving of cattle to pound created contention and outrage ; and some, cases of disputed possession of land and houses, which had also been the cause of outrage. The clerk of the sessions informed me, that the criminal business has greatly increased since the decline of the linen trade ; and that it rarely happened, that those in full employment were implicated in any matter requiring magisterial interference. I saw less formality, and more of the free and easy, at the sessions here, than I had seen elsewhere. Every one took a part in what was going on. Lord Sligo's driver, who was sitting near, would say of a witness, “ Don't believe it, your worship ;” and a clerk, an interpreter, or even a reporter for a newspaper, would suggest a question ; and the magistrates would interrogate accordingly.

Many spots in the neighbourhood of Westport are worthy of a visit : the road along the bay, and skirting the “ Reek,” which rises close to the water, is a very interesting road. I drove ten or twelve miles in this direction; and ascended about a thousand feet up the Reek. It would have been useless to have ascended to the summit, for it was one of those hot and rather hazy days, when a very distant prospect is too indistinct to be attractive. From the more moderate elevation to which I ascended, I enjoyed a finer view. Newport bay, one of the most

capacious on the Irish coast, with its hundreds of islands, lay spread out at my feet ; and the opposite mountains of Coraan, and of Achill island, finely bounded the horizon. The ascent of the Reek is not difficult ; and I have no doubt, that on a favourable day the view from the summit would abundantly repay the labour of it. Alas ! there are many hundreds who ascend the Reek with a less rational object,—pilgrims, who flock there to perform their “ stations,” and do penance, by laborious and painful modes of ascent. It was station-time when I was in this neighbourhood ; and these deluded creatures might be seen in scores, fair weather and foul, passing along the road to the Reek, and ascending its sides.

I had at one time intended to have visited Achill island ; but from information I received from those who knew it well, I concluded that a visit to it would not be productive of much advantage. I could easily gather, that life, among the people there, or in “ the Mullet,” differs little, if at all, from life in the remote western parts of Galway, or Kerry, which I had already visited. How, indeed, should it be different, since their means of existence must be similar, and since civilization has made nearly equal progress throughout them all ? I have no doubt, however, that to the traveller whose only object is scenery, and who does not weary of a repetition of the wild and lonely, that an excursion to these parts might possess some interest. To a sportsman, it is certain, that the attractions of Achill and the Mullet are many.

I now left Westport for Castlebar. I found the country lying between the two towns undulating and agreeable ; partly under cultivation, but much of it waste. I passed on the left a pretty loch, several miles long, called Loch Dan, with cultivated banks, and adorned by more than one wooded island. I also passed by many flourishing fields of flax, covered with its pretty pale blue flowers. The cottages by the wayside were all of the poorest description ; and the small patches of cultivation round them, and the absence of grazing land, showed that these people might be classed among the poor of Mayo. I also noticed a good many cabins padlocked ; and was told, that the owners had gone to harvesting, either in the Low Countries, or in England. We have certainly no proof of want of will among the Irish peasantry to work, in the thousands who travel every season from the remotest parts of Ireland, to earn a pound or two at laborious harvest work ; and who carry back, sewed up in the sleeve of their ragged coat, or elsewhere, these hard and far-sought earnings, to pay the rent of their cabin, and bit of potato-land. Let but the violence of party be laid aside ; or rather, let government, disregarding the violence of extreme party, steadily pursue a course of moderation, impartiality, consistency, and firmness ; removing real grievances ; improving the physical condition of the people, by devising means of employment ; and acting on their intellect, by a rational education,—and agitators would speedily find agitation a losing trade.

I accosted many individuals, travelling from Mayo and elsewhere, to find harvest work ; and always received the same answer to my interrogations. These men had no constant employment at home ; and when employed, their wages were sixpence per day : and I was invariably told, that if they could find constant work in their own country, at ten-pence, they would rather remain at home than travel to England, even to receive the still higher wages to be earned there. Every year the number of those who travel to England must diminish ; for every year large portions of new ground are brought under tillage.

Castlebar is not so pretty a town as Westport ; but it is a place of greater business ; and it is a considerably larger and more populous town. There is only one good street in Castlebar ; but the town contains many lanes ; and has very long, bad suburbs of mud cabins. The retail trade of Castlebar is necessarily good ; for no town of considerable size lies to the north nearer than Ballina, and none to the east nearer than Boyle, a distance of at least forty miles. Castlebar possesses scarcely any direct export trade ; but it enjoys a large share of the linen trade of the district,—at least three times more linen being sold in the market of Castlebar than in that of Westport. It must be understood, however, that the linen market of Castlebar includes Balinrobe, and its neighbourhood, where there is no market for the linen produced there.

I found great want of employment in Castlebar. There had recently been a considerable demand for labour on public works,—a new gaol, and new barracks, having been lately constructed : but these works were now completed ; and the labour market was consequently more overstocked than before they began. This is invariably the case with every kind of employment which does not produce capital, or pave the way for investment. The construction of internal communications, and the cultivation of land, are the only kinds of employment from which improvement in condition must be certain and progressive. Castlebar and its neighbourhood are the property of Lord Lucan, who enjoys in Castlebar the reputation of being a tolerably fair landlord.

I chanced to be at Castlebar when the financial statement of ministers was received, and with it, intelligence of the reduction of duty on Irish spirits. This intelligence suggested the propriety of a few inquiries, by which I might form some opinion as to the policy of that measure, and some judgment as to its operation. The result of these inquiries was not favourable to the policy of the measure. I found that illicit whiskey could be purchased at one-half the price of legalized whiskey ; so that in all probability the measure will be inefficacious. The temptation to distil potheen will still exist, notwithstanding the reduction of duty on legalized whiskey, because its price will still be greatly lower. In order to produce any decidedly good effect, it would be necessary either to reduce the duty on legal whiskey to such an extent, that the trifling difference in price between the legal and the illicit spirit would be no compensation to the private distiller for his risk,—or else, greatly to increase the duty on spirits, and to make the lands answerable for illicit distillation. If one object of legislating on this subject be the improvement of morals, the former would be by far the preferable mode. Intoxication and intemperate habits are increased in a tenfold degree by illicit distillation. Not in towns only, but in every cabin throughout the country, the habit of drinking whiskey is acquired by the young : because almost every small landholder distils his own whiskey ; and the still itself is a point of concentration for gossip, or worse—and drinking ; a sort of mountain gin-shop, where there is no restraint from anticipation of a reckoning to pay. The diminution of only one shilling in the duty on spirit will still leave the distiller of potheen a temptation to distil ; but if the duty were reduced still another shilling, the advantage of only one shilling in the price of potheen would not be compensation for the risk incurred. I could purchase at Castlebar as much potheen as I had a mind at 3s. 4d. the gallon.

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

Author : Henry David Inglis

Publisher : Whittaker

Year : 1838

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : Google

Book from the collections of : Harvard University

Collection : americana

Notes : Originally published in 2 v. under title: Ireland in 1834.

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/ajourneythrough00inglgoog>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

September 26 2011