

## The Shannon, Lough Rea and Lough Derg

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*Beauties and antiquities of Ireland*  
*being a tourist's guide to its most beautiful scenery and an archaeologist's manual for its*  
*most interesting ruins.*

Thomas O'Neill Russell

1897

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### Loch Ree

OF all the great lakes of Ireland there is none so little known to tourists or the public in general as Loch Ree. It is the fourth in size, Loch Neagh, Loch Erne, and Loch Corrib being the only Irish lakes of greater extent, but none of them exceeds Loch Ree in beauty. Loch Erne is a noble sheet of water, and is adorned with many beautiful islands, but owing to its peculiar shape, one cannot take in all its charms from any point on its shores ; but there are dozens of places on the banks of Loch Ree from which all its great expanse of water, and most of the charming features of the country that surrounds it, can be taken in at a single glance. If the shores of Loch Ree were mountainous it would be one of the most beautiful lakes, not only in Ireland, but in the world. It is strange that it is not more generally known, and it lying almost in the geographical centre of Ireland, and surrounded by some of the richest land and most beautiful *paysage* scenery to be found anywhere. People rush to Killarney, Connemara, Achill and many other places, and almost totally neglect this noble expanse of the king of Irish rivers, the Shannon. It is the unfortunate commercial state of Ireland that has caused the scenery of the Shannon to be so little known. If there were dozens of thriving and populous towns on its banks, as there would be if it flowed through any other country than Ireland, large and commodious steamers would be plying on its waters, and the beauties of Loch Ree and Loch Dearg would be as well known as those of Windermere or Killarney. Nothing can more plainly show how fast Ireland is retrograding from even the very mediocre trade she enjoyed half a century ago than the fact that the passenger steam-boats that used to ply almost daily in the summer season between Carrick-on-Shannon or Lanesboro and Killaloe have long ceased to run, and are now rotting somewhere on the Lower Shannon. The decline in the population, and the consequent decline in trade, became so great that it was found that the money taken did not pay more than seventy per cent, of even the working expenses of those steamers, and they had to stop running. The writer travelled in one of them more than thirty years ago between Athlone and Killaloe. They were large side-wheel steamers that would carry over one hundred passengers, and on which excellent meals could be obtained at a moderate price. There is probably not in Europe a more generally interesting river than that from Athlone to Killaloe, but it is now practically closed, not only to tourists, but to the public in general, for a passenger steamer has not traversed the Upper Shannon for well-nigh thirty years. It is no wonder, then, that the glories of Loch Ree, with its almost countless islands, and the glories of Loch Dearg, with its mountain-girded shores, are now nearly as unknown to tourists and to the Irish public in general as are the reaches of the Congo or the Niger. It is simply heartrending to think that decline of population and general decay have made the mighty waters of the Shannon, that runs almost from one end of Ireland to the other, an almost lifeless stream, for the few little row-boats and sailing smacks one sees on it would not, all told, hold more people than the life-boats of a single Atlantic steamer. Bad as things are, they seem to be getting worse, for

there is hardly a single town or city on the Shannon that is not declining in trade and population. At the rate things are going on, a turf boat will soon be the only sort of craft to be seen on the waters of Ireland's greatest river ! It is, however, cheering to be able to state that there is good reason to believe that steps are being taken to re-establish a line of passenger steam-boats on the Upper Shannon.

The tyranny and folly of man may mar towns and turn fields into wildernesses, but they cannot mar nature. If no steam-boats plough the waters of Loch Ree, and if men have given place to cattle and sheep on its banks, it is still as beautiful as ever. Its sinuous shores are still as fair to the eye as they were fifty years ago, when a teeming population lived on them, and when twenty thousand people might be seen at the annual regatta that used to be held every autumn on its waters. Nothing less than an earthquake could destroy the beauty of Loch Ree. It has every element of scenic beauty save mountains, but such are its general beauties that mountains are hardly missed. Loch Dearg is almost surrounded by mountains, but it is not nearly so fair to look upon as Loch Ree. The former lake is almost entirely islandless, but Loch Ree is studded with them. In traversing its entire length, from Lanesboro' to Athlone, a distance of twenty miles, islands are ever in view. Hare Island is the most beautiful island in the lake ; seen from the waters or from the mainland it seems a mass of leaves. The trees grow on it so thickly that they dip their branches into the water almost all round it. Lord Castlemaine has a charming rustic cottage on Hare Island, and the pleasure grounds attached to it are laid out with very great taste and skill. It is one of the most beautiful sylvan island retreats in Europe. Hare Island contains nearly a hundred acres. Inchmore is still larger, but not so well wooded. Then there are Inchbofin, Inis Cloran, Inchturk, Saints' Island, Hag's Island, Carberry Island, and many others, the names of which would be tedious to mention. The islands of Loch Ree are of almost all sizes, from a hundred acres to a square perch. Except in the vast St Lawrence alone, with its famed thousand islands, there are few river expansions in the world that contain so many islands as Loch Ree. Its shores are fully as beautiful as its islands. It would be hard to conceive anything in the way of shore scenery more beautiful than the shores of Loch Ree for eight or ten miles on the Leinster side of the lake between the mouth of the river Inny and Athlone. The shores are so irregular and cut up into so many promontories and headlands that, to follow the water's edge from Athlone to where the Inny enters the Shannon, a distance of not more than ten miles as the crow flies, would involve a journey of over fifty. Every headland is tree-crowned, and every promontory rock-girded. Very little of the shores of this beautiful lake are swampy ; they are generally as rocky as those of a Highland tarn, with deep, blue water ever fretting rock and stone into thousands of fantastic shapes. So rocky are most parts of the shores of Loch Ree, that those aesthetic persons living near it who wish to form rock-works in their pleasure grounds find abundance of water-worn stones on the shores of Loch Ree to make rock-work of any shape required.

The shores of Loch Ree, particularly the Leinster shore, are more adorned with gentlemen's seats than the shores of perhaps any other lake in Ireland. From Athlone to nearly the head of the lake there is a succession of gentlemen's seats. Many of them are kept with great care and taste, and are in themselves well worth a visit. The house in which Goldsmith spent his early youth is about two miles from Loch Ree, and about two-and-a-half from the village of Glassan. The house is a ruin, but a well-preserved one. When it was built seems unknown, but from what can be gathered from the old men living in its vicinity, it seems to have been built about the year 1700. The walls are still intact. It was two storeys high, and must have contained seven or eight apartments. The name Auburn is still applied to the townland on which the house stands ; but the name seems to have originated with Goldsmith himself, for the place does not appear to have been so called before his time. Lissoy is its Irish name, but Auburn does not seem to be an Irish name at all. The " Jolly Pigeons" public-house still

exists. It is about a mile from Auburn. There never was a village called Auburn in the locality. The nearest place to Goldsmith's house that could be called a village is Glassan.

Loch Ree is not void of considerable historic interest. There are many noble ruins on its shores ; among them Randoon Castle is the most remarkable. It was one of the earliest Norman-French keeps erected in Ireland. It is situated on a bold promontory jutting into the lake on the Connacht side, about ten or twelve miles north of Athlone. It is now generally called St John's Castle. At *Blein Potog*, or Pudding Bay, took place in the year 999 one of the most important events in Irish history namely, the surrender of the sovereignty of Ireland to Brian Boromha by Malachy the Second. The Munster king came up the Shannon with a large army in a flotilla of boats, and Malachy met him there and surrendered to him. Many think that it was, in a political point of view, one of the most disastrous events of Irish history, for the usurpation of the chief sovereignty by Brian caused such weakness and confusion after his death, that each provincial ruler wanted to be chief king, and created such wars and political chaos that no chief king that succeeded possessed complete sway over the country, the so-called chief kings that succeeded being kings only in name. For a full account of the treaty of Blein Potog, the reader is referred to the " Wars of the Gaels and the Galls," translated by the late Rev. Dr Todd. The site of the treaty is some ten miles north of Athlone, on the Leinster shore of Loch Ree.

Athlone is one of the most picturesque and interesting inland towns in Ireland. Its situation is simply superb, in the almost exact geographical centre of Ireland, at the foot of one of the most beautiful of lakes, and on the banks of a noble river, deep and wide enough to carry ships on its waters.

Athlone is one of the few towns perhaps the only one on the Shannon that is not decaying at present. For many years after the famine it decayed rapidly, but some thirty years ago a woollen factory was established ; now there are two woollen factories and a saw-mill that give employment to some hundreds of hands, consequently Athlone has been saved from decay. But comparatively prosperous as it is, it is not one-fourth as prosperous as it ought to be considering its splendid situation and the fertility and beauty of the country that surrounds it. It has recently become a great railway centre ; one can go by rail from Athlone to almost any part of Ireland. But all the railways and all the fertility of all the world cannot bring real prosperity to any country in which the population is declining. The decline of the population in Athlone itself and in the country surrounding it has, during the last fifty years, been something frightful, and can only be fully realised by those who remember what it was in former times. A market day in Athlone now is very different from a market day there half a century ago. The writer recollects having been at a market in Athlone when a small boy, about the year 1841 or '42, and saw more people there in one market than could be seen in twenty markets there now. The town was too small to contain much more than half of them ; they flowed out into the fields surrounding it. The crowds in the streets were so dense that it would take hours to jostle one's way from one end of the town to the other, and, what will hardly be credited by those whose memories do not go back fifty years, there were certainly three persons speaking Irish for one who spoke English. One might attend markets in Athlone now every week in the year and not hear a word of any language but English. Irish has completely died out of the country surrounding Athlone, save in the south-western corner of the county Roscommon, where some old people still speak it. There is something inexpressibly sad in the fading away of any form of National speech, but, above all, in the fading away of a tongue so old and once so cultivated as Irish. It seems to forebode not only the death of all real National aspirations, but the death of heart and soul. It seems to show that Philistinism is rapidly driving away sentiment from the Irish people. But the life of the Irish peasant has been so long such a battle for mere existence that it is no wonder that he came to look with contempt on everything that did not administer to his mere animal wants. He is rapidly im-

proving since he has had a barrier put between him and the generally cruel treatment he was wont to receive from his landlord. None but those who remember what his position was fifty years ago, and who see what it is now, can fully understand all the advance he has made. In spite of the awful decline of population in the rural districts of Ireland during the last fifty years, there is much to be seen in them to gladden the heart of the philanthropist. Small farmers' cottages, that would formerly be a disgrace to a Zulu or an Esquimaux, are now not only generally clean, but sometimes beautiful. Flowers in pots in the windows and evergreens creeping up the walls of a peasant's cottage would have caused him to be laughed at by his neighbours fifty years ago, but now they cause him to be respected instead of being laughed at. He will become again what he once was, one of the most soulful and un-Philistine of beings ; it is probable he will become such when better laws and freer institutions shall have raised him from the slough of poverty and despondency in which he has been steeping for centuries.

Tourists and the travelling public in general will find good accommodation at the Prince of Wales Hotel in Athlone, in which town boats can be hired by those going either up or down the Shannon.

### Clonmacnois

THE ruins of Clonmacnois form by far the most interesting architectural remains on the Shannon. Their situation is unique on a sandy knoll overlooking the winding river, as it flows in great reaches among marshy meadows of apparently illimitable extent. Thousands of acres of them on both banks of the Shannon are spread before one's gaze when standing at the base of any of the ruined shrines of this ancient seat of piety and learning. The ecclesiastics of ancient Ireland seem to have been gifted with an extraordinary amount of appreciation for the beautiful and unique in nature. The wilder and the more beautiful a place was, the more it seems to have attracted them. Cashel's solitary Rock, Glendaloch's gloomy vale, and this barren sandhill overlooking the most peculiar scenery in all the island, were the places in which they reared their most cherished fanes and most beautiful buildings. The situation of Clonmacnois cannot be said to be beautiful, but it is strange and weird to the last degree more strange and weird, perhaps, than any other place in Ireland.

The best and most agreeable way to reach Clonmacnois is from Athlone. It is twelve English miles from Athlone by road, and ten by river. By river is not only the cheapest way but the most interesting. Sails can be used on this part of the Shannon almost as well as on Loch Ree, for the banks are so low that every breeze that blows can be fully utilised ; and the river is so crooked, that no matter from what quarter the wind comes it can sometimes fill the sail. The Shannon here is no tiny stream like the Liffey, but a wide river, never less than from 150 to 200 yards in breadth, and generally deep enough to float a small ocean steamer. The current is, however, not rapid.

The first thing that strikes the stranger who sees Clonmacnois for the first time is the extraordinary view from it over the largest extent of callow meadows to be seen in any part of Ireland. It must not be thought that these meadows are mere bogs, for some of the finest hay is raised on them. The grass that grows on them must be of a fairly good quality, for they let at from £5 to £6 per Irish acre, the purchaser having to save the hay, and run all the risk attending the making it in land so liable to be flooded. Not infrequently, the taker of meadow on the vast flats that border the Shannon between Loch Ree and Loch Derg, will awaken some fine morning and find all his small cocks of hay afloat, sailing placidly southward, and more likely to find their way to Killaloe than to his haggard. The second thing that will strike the observant stranger in Clonmacnois is the small size of the churches. That it was one of the most important ecclesiastical establishments in ancient Ireland there cannot be any doubt, for

it is more frequently mentioned in ancient Irish history and annals than any other place of its kind in the country. Yet the largest church in it, the ruins of which exist, would not, by any stretch of imagination, accommodate more than three or four hundred worshippers. There are the ruins of but three churches existing in Clonmacnois ; the largest of them is called Cathedral, the two smaller ones can hardly be called churches. They must have been oratories, and would not combined contain over two hundred persons. When Clonmacnois was in its most prosperous condition that was in the early part of the ninth century, or about the time when the Danish invasions were heaviest and most harassing Ireland must have been a very populous country. There are so many proofs of this in ancient Gaelic annals and literature that it may be regarded as a fact. How, then, did it happen that the churches in Clonmacnois were so small? This is a question that cannot be answered fully. It may be that what now remains of its churches is of comparatively recent origin, and may not have been erected until the decadence of the population had commenced at the time of the Danish invasions, which decadence became more and more pronounced down to the latter part of the sixteenth century. Or it may have been that there were large wooden Churches in Clonmacnois in ancient times, not a vestige or trace of which would be found after fire had done its work on them.

The two round towers are by far the most interesting and beautiful buildings in Clonmacnois. The larger one wants apparently twenty or thirty feet of the top ; whether it was struck by lightning, or knocked off by cannon, no one seems to know. The smaller tower is as perfect as it was when its builder pronounced it finished a thousand years ago. No more beautiful piece of architecture in the way of a tower ever was erected. It seems to be absolute perfection. The most skilled modern artisan in stone could not find an imperfection in it. It is built entirely of cut stones.

The roof or dome is made of lozenge-shaped stones, fitted so closely and finished so well that time and weather seem to have passed over it in vain, for it is, as far as can be seen from the ground at its base, as perfect as it ever was. Of all round towers in Ireland, it is the most beautiful and perfect. The larger tower seems to have been built of stones similar to those of the smaller one, but as it wants its top its beauty is almost entirely spoiled. What remains of it seems about as perfect in its architecture as human hands could make it. The smaller tower appears to afford positive proof of Petrie's theory as to the post-Christian origin of the Irish round towers, for it and the little church or oratory at its base, and out of which it rises, were evidently built at the same time, for the walls of both are actually in some places one. Like some few of the existing round towers (the one near Navan, for instance), the smaller one at Clonmacnois has no opening in the roof by which the sound of bells could be emitted, showing clearly that it could never have been erected solely for a belfry ; for no matter how big a bell might be, its sound would not have been heard a hundred yards away, if rung under the windowless stone roof of this most perfect and beautiful of Irish round towers. That round towers were sometimes used as belfries seems very probable ; but that their principal use, and the prime object for which they were erected, were to protect the clergy and the treasures of the churches from the marauding Northmen is the theory regarding them that is now most generally accepted.

Clonmacnois is not so rich in ancient crosses as some other places like it. There are only two to be seen there at present. They are not nearly so well carved and ornamented as many that still remain in other Irish cemeteries. There is not, so far as can be seen by the passer-by, a single inscription in the Irish language visible, though some scores of such inscriptions exist in it, every one of which has been faithfully copied and translated by Doctor Petrie in his great work, " Christian Inscriptions in the Irish Language." The inscribed stones are, very properly, stowed away in a vault under lock and key where they are safe from the mischief of so many who would delight in marring and effacing any thing they could not understand.

There are plenty of inscriptions in English to be seen in Clonmacnois, for it is still used as a place of interment. This takes away a great deal of its antique charm and general interest. It seems a sort of profanation to erect a modern tomb with an English inscription on it at the very base of a hoary round tower that was a wonder of art and beauty when London was little else than a large village, and when England itself was hardly civilised, and as politically powerless as Saint Domingo or Corea.

Clonmacnois has suffered as much from vandalism as any other place of its kind in Ireland. It was taken and spoiled by the Danes when at the height of its splendour in the ninth century. But it was not the Danes that committed the worst depredations in this wonderfully unique and ancient place. They were committed by men who used gunpowder, for it was evidently by it that most of the old buildings of Clonmacnois were destroyed. It is generally believed that it was by one of Cromwell's captains who was stationed with some troops at Athlone when the Royalist cause had been lost that most of the destruction at Clonmacnois was accomplished. The blowing up of the magnificent castle erected here by Hugo de Lacy in the twelfth Century, is attributed to Cromwell's troopers, as is also the demolition of some thirty or forty feet of the larger of the two round towers, known as O'Ruarc's tower.

There are the remains of only three churches extant in Clonmacnois ; but we know from authentic annals and history that there were nearly a dozen churches in it at one time. What became of them, or where they stood, cannot now be known. Many of them were, probably, wooden churches, and, when once destroyed, left no trace. The ruins of the ancient nunnery are distant nearly quarter of a mile from the church-yard, on the grounds of a gentleman named Charlton. It is only about thirty years ago since an attempt was made to clear away the rubbish in which they were buried, and to try if any of the sculptured stones could be recovered. The excavations were made under the supervision of the Protestant Bishop of Limerick. Sculptured stone-work of the highest order of art was dug up from many feet under the surface where the destroyers had buried it. Visitors to Clonmacnois will not have any difficulty in seeing the ruins of the nunnery, for Mr Charlton willingly permits visitors to see them. It is not only curious, but hopeful and pleasant, to find people of the same religious belief altering so much for the better as time rolls by. Whilom Protestant men and a whilom Protestant Government did all they could in the seventeenth century to turn Clonmacnois into a heap of ruins, almost as void and as shapeless as those of Babylon ; but Protestant men and a Protestant Government in the nineteenth century have done everything in their power to save it from further decay, and to dig up its sculptured stones from the dust in which ancient Protestant fanaticism and bigotry had buried them.

Clonmacnois was founded by St Kieran, who died in the year 549. There are records of the erection of most of its ancient buildings to be found in Irish annals and history. According to the *Chronicon Scottorum*, a work of high authority, the Cathedral was built in the year 909. The Cathedral that existed when Turgesius the Dane obtained sway for some years over the greater part of Ireland, and when his wife used to issue her orders from that building, was probably of wood, for no trace of it appears extant. Doctor Petrie says that the larger round tower was erected in the tenth century, and the smaller one in the eleventh or early part of the twelfth. There is good authority to prove that the nunnery was erected and endowed by the too well-remembered Dearvorigil, wife of O'Ruarc, whose liaison with Dermot Mac Murrough, King of Leinster, is popularly believed to have brought about the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland.

One of the great curiosities of Clonmacnois is the powder-blown-up castle built by Hugo de Lacy in the latter part of the twelfth century, the remains of which stand on a hill about two hundred yards from the cemetery. It is generally known as the Prior's house, but it was evidently built as a place of defence. It was one of the strongest castles ever erected in

Ireland. Although comparatively small, building and enclosure not covering more than half an acre, it was a place of immense strength, and before the invention of gunpowder could have defied a host. It is encompassed by a fosse in some places forty feet in depth, that descends sheer from the walls. The walls are of immense thickness and strength, from six to eight feet thick in many places, and so firmly are the stones embedded in grouting that to detach one of them from the powder-riven walls, or from the vast masses of blown-up masonry that lie scattered around, a hammer and chisel would be required. Huge heaps of the ruined walls, some of them tons in weight, have been tumbled into the deep fosse that surrounds the castle, but they are still almost as solid as rocks. If ever the art of building solid walls was brought to perfection, it was by those who reared this now ruined pile. To know the strength of gunpowder and the solidity of ancient masonry, one should see this ruined castle of Clonmacnois.

With all the beauties and diversity of scenery of the Shannon, on the banks of which stands all that remains of Clonmacnois, and with all the places of historic interest laved by its waters, it is a disgrace to Ireland at large that there is not a single passenger steamboat on it above Limerick. It is nearly a hundred and fifty miles from Carrick-on-Shannon to Killaloe, and in all that vast distance of spreading lake and winding river there is not a passenger steamboat to be seen! There may be said to be no obstacle to navigation in all that distance for boats drawing from five to six feet of water, and there are only four or five locks to pass through. No other river of equal length affords more variety of scenery than the Shannon. Sometimes the voyager passes by wooded banks, anon through apparently illimitable meadows, and then through great lakes like veritable inland seas, island-studded or mountain-girded, change of scene occurring in almost every mile. Let it be hoped that a line of passenger steamers will soon again be seen on the waters of this great and beautiful river, this “ancient stream,” as its Gaelic name is said to mean, that has on its banks so many relics of the past the grass-grown rath, the hoary round tower, the crumbling castle, and above all, the ruined fanes of Clonmacnois.

### Loch Derg

THIS is another of the great lakes of Ireland. It is over twenty miles long and between two and three miles in average breadth. It is really curious that a small island like Ireland should have so many immense lakes in it. There is, probably, no other country in the world of the same size there is certainly no island of the same size on which so much fresh water is to be found. It would seem as if nature intended Ireland for a continent, and not for an island, by giving it lakes so entirely disproportioned to its size.

Loch Derg, anciently called Deirgdheirc, and at present pronounced Dharrig by the peasantry, would be the most beautiful of all the great lakes of Ireland if its islands were as numerous as those of Loch Erne, or even of Loch Ree. It has the defect that almost all lakes have whose shores are mountainous or hilly. Want of islands is the great drawback to the picturesqueness of most of the Scotch lakes and those of the north of England. A few islands do not add much to the beauty of a lake. There must be plenty of them to produce full effect. The few islands in Loch Lomond, because they are so few, hardly add to its beauty. The islands in Loch Derg are very few, and the most picturesque of them are so near the shore that they seem part of it to the voyager on the lake. There is one very large island, Illaunmore the great island, as its name signifies but it does not add very much to the scenic attractions. The charms of Loch Derg are its semi-mountainous shores. It would be incorrect to call the bold hills on either side of the lake mountains, for very few of them reach an altitude of more than a thousand feet; but they are most graceful in their outlines, and are, for the most part, covered with luxuriant grass up to their very summits. The lake is by no means straight; its shores are tortuous and full of indentations, so that there is a good deal of change of scene

when sailing on it. But if the tourist or traveller who wishes to sail on Loch Derg is not what is usually called a “good sailor,” he should consult the barometer before he goes on to this great lake, for sometimes, when the south-west wind sweeps up its twenty or twenty-five miles of water, a sea almost worthy of the Channel will sometimes rise in a very short time. Many a sea-sick passenger used to be seen in the good times long ago on Loch Derg, when large side-wheel passenger boats used to run regularly between Athlone and Killaloe. Those boats were large enough to carry over a hundred passengers without being in the least crowded, and the cabins were large enough to accommodate fifty people at dinner. A trip from Athlone to Killaloe on a fast boat would, on a fine summer day, be one of the most enjoyable things in the way of an excursion by water that can be imagined. It is over thirty years since the writer experienced the pleasure of it, and the remembrance of its enjoyableness haunts him still. The shores of Loch Derg are much wilder than the shores of Loch Erne or Loch Ree. Very few houses, and nothing that could be called a town, can be seen through the whole twenty-five miles of the lake. The hills that bound it both on the Munster and on the Connacht sides are almost altogether grass land, and very little cultivation is therefore to be seen. But the bold, winding shores and the green hills form a landscape of a very striking kind, and there are many who maintain that the scenery of Loch Derg is finer than that of Loch Ree. Both lakes are magnificent sheets of water, and environed with a fair and goodly country ; and were they anywhere else but in Ireland, their waters would be the highway for dozens of steamers, while at present they are almost deserted, and may be said to be

“As lone and silent  
As the great waters of some desert land.”

Loch Derg is full of interest for the antiquarian, especially its lower part. One of the most ancient and important ecclesiastical establishments of ancient Ireland, Iniscealtra, the island of the churches, is on its western shore, close to the land, separated from it only by about a quarter of a mile of water. Iniscealtra was one of the most important places of its kind in the south of Ireland. It was founded by St Cainin certainly not later than the end of the sixth or beginning of the seventh century, for he died in 653. John O’Donovan in his unpublished letters says that he is represented in ancient Irish literature as “A very holy man, a despiser of the world, and an inexorable chastiser of the flesh. He is said to have been author of commentaries on the Psalms. He was buried in Iniscealtra.” There is a fine round tower in Iniscealtra which is traditionally supposed to have been built by St Senanus. It is eighty feet in height, and in fairly good preservation, but it wants the top. The ruins of St Cainin’s Church show it to have been a small building. There are the ruins of two other churches on the island, one called St Mary’s and the other St Michael’s. The establishments on Iniscealtra are of very great antiquity. It is first mentioned in the Annals of the Four Masters under the year 548, recording the death of St Colam in the island. The oldest church in it was dedicated to St Cainin, who was evidently the founder of the place, and the first who sought it as a retreat. He is said to have lived for a long time in a solitary cell, until the fame for holiness he acquired brought an immense number of disciples, for whom he erected a noble monastery in the island, which afterwards became famous. The ruins of St Cainin’s Church prove that it must have been a very beautiful building. It was thought by Petrie and other antiquarians that it and the very beautiful one of Killaloe were erected during the short time in the tenth and eleventh centuries when Brian Boromha and Malachy the Second, by their victories over the Danes, gave the country some rest from the plunderings of those marauders.

At the extreme lower end of Loch Derg is the small but ancient town of Killaloe. Its real name is Cill Dalua, it was called after an ecclesiastic of the name of Dalua, sometimes written Malua, who lived in the sixth century. He placed his disciple, Flannan, over the church. He was made Bishop of Killaloe in the seventh century. The church is known generally as St Flannan’s. The Earl of Dunraven, speaking of the beauty of the ruins of this church and the

buildings attached to it, says, “ These ancient buildings are on a wooded hill which slopes in a gentle incline down to the brink of the Shannon. The cathedral and small stone-roofed church stand side by side, and the walls of the latter are thickly covered with ivy. Nothing can be more impressive than the aspect of this venerable and simple building, surrounded by majestic trees, and hidden in deep shadows of thick foliage. A solemn mystery seems to envelop its ancient walls, and the silence is only broken by the sound of the river that rolls its great volume of water along the base of the hill on which it stands.”

But the most historic and probably the most interesting thing about Killaloe is the site of King Brian’s palace of Kincora, a place so famed in history and song. Perhaps it will be better to let such a famous man on Irish history and archaeology as O’Donovan tell about Kincora. He says in his unpublished letters while on the Ordnance Survey : “ On the summit of the hill opposite the bridge of Killaloe stood Brian Boramha’s palace of Kincora, but not a trace of it is now visible. It must have extended from the verge of the hill over the Shannon, to where the present Roman Catholic chapel stands. I fear that it will be impracticable to show its site on the Ordnance map, as no field works are visible. Of the history of the palace of Kincora little or nothing is known, but from the few references to it we occasionally find, we may safely infer that it was first erected by Brian, Imperator Scottorum, and that it was not more than two centuries inhabited by his successors. Kincora was demolished in 1088 by Donnell MacLachlin, king of Aileach (Ulster), and we are told that he took 160 hostages consisting of Danes and Irish.” Kincora must have been rebuilt after it was demolished by MacLachlin, for we are told in the Annals of the Four Masters that in 1107 Kincora and Cashel were burned by lightning, and sixty vats of inetheglin and beer were destroyed ; but it must have been again rebuilt, for the same annals say that in 1118 Turloch O’Connor (King of Connacht), at the head of a great army of Connacht-men, burned Kincora and hurled it, both stones and timber, into the Shannon. Kincora was, like all dwelling-places in those times, built almost entirely of wood ; and it is hardly to be wondered at that after having been burned so often by man and by the elements, no vestige of it should remain. It has been completely wiped out.

A description of Kincora would hardly be complete without giving MacLiag’s Lament for it, translated by Clarence Mongan. MacLiag was chief poet and secretary to Brian Boramha. The poem is little known even in Ireland ; to the English reader it will be absolutely new. The writer gives two prime reasons for reproducing it ; one, because it is such a very fine poem ; and the other, because it has heretofore never been correctly given.

#### MacLiag’s Lament For Kincora.

“ Where, oh Kincora, is Brian the Great ?  
And where is the beauty that once was thine ?  
Oh where are the princes and nobles that sate  
At the feasts in thy halls and drank the red wine,  
Where, oh Kincora ?

“ Where, oh Kincora, are thy valorous lords,  
Oh whither, thou Hospitable, are they gone ?  
Oh where the Dalcassians of cleaving swords,  
And where are the heroes that Brian led on,  
Where, oh Kincora ?

“ And where is Morough, descendant of kings,  
Defeater of hundreds, the daringly brave,  
Who set but light store on jewels and rings,

Who swam down the torrent and laughed at the wave,  
Where, oh Kincora ?

“ And where is Donagh, King Brian’s brave son,  
And where is Conaing, the beautiful chief,  
And Cian and Corc ? alas, they are gone !  
They have left me this night all alone in my grief,  
Alone, oh Kincora ?

“ And where are the chiefs with whom Brian went forth,  
The ne’er vanquished sons of Evin the Brave,  
The great King of Eogh’nacht, [1] renowned for his  
worth,  
And Baskin’s great host from the western wave,  
Where, oh Kincora ?

“ And where is Duvlann of the swift-footed steeds,  
And where is Cian who was son of Molloy,  
And where is King Lonergan, the fame of whose  
deeds  
In the red battle-field, no time can destroy ?  
Where, oh Kincora ?

“ And where is the youth of majestic height,  
The faith-keeping prince of the Scotts ? [2] even he,  
As wide as his fame was, as great as his might,  
Was tributary, oh Kincora, to thee,  
To thee, oh Kincora !

“ They are gone, those heroes of royal birth,  
Who plundered no churches and broke no trust  
’Tis weary for me to be living on earth  
When they, oh Kincora, lie low in the dust.  
Low, oh Kincora !

“ Oh never again will princes appear  
To rival Dalcassians of cleaving swords !  
I can ne’er dream of meeting afar or near,  
In the east or the west, such heroes and lords,  
Never, Kincora !

“ Oh dear are the images mem’ry calls up  
Of Brian Boru, [3] how he never would miss  
To give me at banquet the first bright cup,  
Oh, why did he heap on me honour like this,  
Why, oh Kincora ?

“ I am MacLiag, and my home’s on the lake ;  
And oft to that palace whose beauty has fled  
Came Brian to ask me, I went for his sake ;  
Oh my grief ! that I live when Brian is dead !  
Dead, oh Kincora ! ”

So far the demolished palace of Brian, and the writer, like Brian himself, “ returns to Kincora no more.”

No lover of the beauties of nature should be on this part of the Shannon and not visit the great rapids of Doonass. They are only about ten miles below Killaloe. If seen when the river is full they are the grandest thing of their kind in the British Isles. The Shannon here looks like a continental river, containing ordinarily a volume of water greater than any river in France. The country round Doonass, though flat, is superlatively beautiful. The limpid, rushing river flows on among meadows and pastures of the brightest verdure, adorned with stately trees, and bright in summer-time with innumerable flowers. There is nothing terrible or awe-inspiring about Doonass. It is quiet and peaceful in the true sense of the word. Even the great rushing river, as it glides down the gentle slope of the rapids, makes no noise except a deep, musical murmur that would lull to sleep rather than startle. The rapids of Doonass form a scene so incomparably lovely, and so unlike anything to be seen in Great Britain, or to be seen in any other part of Ireland, that it is a wonder they are not better known. They can be reached best from Limerick, being not over three miles from that city. One of the most curious things about those grand and beautiful rapids, is the almost total ignorance which exists about them, not only in Great Britain, but in Ireland itself. If they were situated on a wild, hard-to-be-got-at part of the Shannon, the general ignorance that exists about them among seekers after the beautiful, would not excite so much wonder. A scene of such great beauty and uniqueness, so near a fine and interesting city like Limerick, to be so little known to those who go so far in search of the beautiful, shows how much the world at large, and even the Irish themselves, have to learn about Ireland. If the rapids of Doonass were in England, or even in the United States, there would be not only one, but perhaps three or four hotels on their banks, hotels which would be full of guests every summer. Let us hope that the beauties of this charming place will be soon better known.

- [1] The Eoghanachts were the posterity of Eoghan Mór, King of Munster in the third century. Eoghanacht meant a people of Munster, descendants of Eoghan ; and Connacht, the descendants of Conn, usually known as Conn of the Hundred Battles, most of which were fought against Eoghan.
- [2] Prince of Scotts ; this was evidently the great Steward, or *mór maor* of Lennox, who aided the Irish at the battle of Clontarf, and was killed there.
- [3] This is an incorrect form of the word. It is *Boramha* in the most correct ancient manuscripts, and is a word of three syllables—Borava. It means “ of the tribute.”

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