

Testimonies of Writers & Tourists

The

Irish People

Their Height, Form and Strength

F. Edmund Hogan, S. J.

“ I never saw a finer country” (than Ireland), “ or, to speak
my mind, a finer people” (than the Irish).

Letter from Ireland by SIR WALTER SCOTT to
JOHANNA BAILIE in the year 1825

Dochum glóire Dé agus onóra na hÉirenn,
Preface to the Four Masters

1899

*Testimonies of Writers and Tourists on the Characteristics of the Peasantry of Mayo, Sligo
and Leitrim.*

“ In Sligo and northern Mayo particularly, the consequences of two centuries of degradation and hardship exhibit themselves in the whole physical condition of the people, affecting not only the features but the frame ; and giving such an example of deterioration from known causes as almost compensates by its value to future ages for the suffering and debasement that past generations have endured in perfecting its appalling lesson in the persons of their descendants. It is not necessary to travel out of Dublin to study in this school. From June till August our quays are a commodious classroom. A hundred professors of spare diet may here be found any day in the week, giving ocular demonstration of the effects of famine on the human frame and visage. Five feet two upon an average, pot-bellied, bow-legged, abortively featured . . . these spectres of a people that once were well grown, able-bodied, and comely, stalk abroad into the daylight of civilization, to fright the Sister Island with annual apparitions of Irish ugliness and Irish want.” [1]

IN 1797, De Latocnaye, a Frenchman, spent nine months going on foot through Ireland, and published his *Rambles* ; at pp. 14, 24, 41, of vol. the 2nd, he writes : — “ The nakedness of the poor near Galway is shocking. Their huts do not seem calculated for human beings, yet they are crowded with healthy fresh-looking children ; it is easy to perceive this, for they often play before the doors of the cabins without any kind of garment. It is an odd remark, but one I have often made the uglier the country is, the handsomer are the women ; in this barren and rocky place they are charming. It is very easy to call people savages (he speaks of Connemara), but do you know where I have found real savages ? It was at Paris, at London, at Dublin, at Edinburgh, in all large cities.”

Dr. McParlan in the *Statistical Survey of Mayo* of 1801, p. 229, speaks of “ the stalwart sons of Mayo ;” the *Statistical Survey of Leitrim* in 1802, p. 63, says “ The people’s clothing is remarkably neat and strong ; they seldom want provisions ; every father in the county sends his children to school.”

The Rev. A. Atkinson, a Protestant writer, says in his *Irish Tourist* : “ The Leitrim peasant appears to me to have a certain amiable simplicity of character. Although in religious (! E.H.), commercial, and literary advantages he may not stand upon a footing with his brother, the Irish northern, he has nevertheless, considered merely in a natural point of view, the advant-

age of him with regard to his country. The northern has not for the most part (if I may judge by the specimens I have seen) his imagination exalted by the same beauty and grandeur of lake and mountain which may have conspired with other causes, to soften and simplify the character of the Leitrim peasant.”

Here we find no trace of degraded dwarfs. I might very easily extend those quotations ; and I might even prove the falsehood of Hall’s statements from the silence of tourists’ books on that matter ; and I could easily show how incompatible his assertions are with the whole tone and tenor of books written on the West of Ireland. [2]

George Petrie, the son of Scotch parents, visited the West of Ireland in 1821. He expresses his amazement at Pinkerton’s assertion, that “ the wild Irish are the veriest savages on the face of the globe,” and says : “ As the result of much enquiry and attentive observation, I am bound to praise their primitive simplicity, ingenuous manners, singular hospitality and honesty. They are brave, hardy, industrious, enterprising, thoughtful, intelligent, innocent. Lying and drinking form no part of their character ; they never swear, have a high sense of propriety, honour, and justice. They are healthy, *comely*, and *prepossessing*, of fine intellect and delicate sensibility ; still wild Irish perhaps, and *poor* certainly, but well-dressed savages, *without tails*, I believe.” He describes two of these Western wild Irish : “ Mr. O’Flaherty, born in Aran, was never farther from his native rocks than Galway ; cannot abide the thought of leaving Aran ; a child in innocence and simplicity, in wisdom and understanding most truly a man, in manners and conduct a polished gentleman ; of middle stature, blue-eyed, dark-complexioned, dark-haired, face long and oval, his dress that of the islanders. Molly McAuley, 70 years old, of singular mental powers, with a figure which, even in decay, bespoke the most perfect symmetry, and a face beaming with beauty, intelligence, and sensibility. Father O’Flaherty, a native of Aranmore, has been here for forty years. Courage is marked on the lips and brow of his manly, toil-worn, weather-beaten countenance—a face a physiognomist would look at for hours with pleasure, it is so harmonious in all its parts.

“ I went to see his people come from Mass. The colours of the dresses were such as the Roman school have always loved the deep red and blue of the female costumes were relieved by the azure dresses of the men. In one place were men, in youthful prime, drawn together in sober discourse ; in another the old people were silent and contemplative. Here, too, were young and unmarried women, with cloaks carelessly disposed in picturesque draperies, while their attitude bespoke the presence of youthful affection and innocent simplicity.”

Dr. W. Stokes, who quotes this in Petrie’s *Life*, adds that for the last ten years in Aran, out of a population of 3,300, with only one magistrate, there was only one per thousand committed annually to prison, and not one sent for trial to assizes in quarter sessions.

In 1833, the Rev. William H. Maxwell, in his *Wild Sports of the West*, writes :—“ In personal appearance the Western peasantry are very inferior to those of the other divisions of the kingdom generally. They are undersized, and by no means so good-looking as their Southern neighbours ; and I would say in other points they are equally deficient. To overcome their early lounging gait and slovenly habits is found by military men a troublesome task ; and while the Tipperary man speedily passes through the hands of the drill-sergeant, the Mayo peasant requires a long and patient ordeal before a martial carriage can be acquired, and he be perfectly *set up* as a soldier. These defects once conquered, none are better for the profession. Hardy, active, patient in wet and cold, and accustomed to indifferent and irregular food, he is admirably adapted to endure the privations and fatigue incident to a soldier’s life on active service ; and in dash and daring *no regiments in the service hold a prouder place* than those which appertain to the kingdom of Connaught.” (Dr. Browne and I deny the first two statements.) *Cf.* pp. 138, 144.

“ It is said that the physical appearance of the Irish peasantry deteriorates as the Northern and Western sea-coasts are approached ; and certainly on the latter the population are very inferior to that of the adjacent counties. Even the inhabitants of different baronies in the same county, as their locality advances inland, will be found to differ materially ; and in an extensive cattle fair the islander will be as easily distinguished from the borderer, whether he be on the Galway or Roscommon frontier, as from the stock-master of Leinster or the jobber from the North. On the score of propriety of conduct, I would assign the female peasantry of this district a high place. When the habits of the country are considered, one would be inclined to suspect that excessive drinking and the frequent scenes of nocturnal festivities, which wakes and dances present, would naturally lead to much immorality. This, however, is not the case. Broken vows will, no doubt, occasionally require the interference of the magistrate or the priest ; but generally the lover makes the only reparation in his power, and the deceived females and deserted children are seldom seen in Erris.”

In 1836 (the very year the *Dublin University Magazine* man penned his fascinating falsehoods), P. Knight, Member of the Institution of Civil Engineers, London, who had known the Mayo and Sligo labourers for twenty years, writes [3] : “ The men of Sligo are good-humoured, good-natured, hospitable, generous, of middle size, active, intelligent, and, when an opportunity offers, industrious. I have found them on the public works as hard-working and attentive as any people I have met with. The mountaineers are *remarkably stout* and healthy, though seldom wearing shoes. Their journeys are extraordinary. A fellow in Ballycroy (Mayo) thinks nothing of taking a ten-gallon keg of whiskey, weighing 150 lbs. at least, and crossing the mountains to Newport, twenty miles away, and returning home in the evening, without the slightest appearance of fatigue, and carelessly resuming his usual occupation. The people of Ballycroy (in Mayo) are an active, hardy, intelligent race of men, hospitable to an extreme, satisfied with little, not seeking what others call comforts. Ballycroy and Achill are inhabited by people called Ultaigh or Ulster men, who went there with O'Donnell in the time of James the First. They retain the Ulster dialect, intermarry almost exclusively with one another, are hardy, low-sized, dark-featured, bold, daring, intrepid, not good-tempered, but hospitable to an extreme. A stranger is seldom seen without being saluted : ‘ You are welcome to this country, stranger.’ They are very intelligent, and of Northern cunning, and are the material of a fine people.”

Petrie, mentioned wrote to Captain Larcom, 1837 :— “ The Sligo people about Lough Gill are a peculiar race, quite Gothic in appearance, fair complexioned, with light hair, blue eyes, and not handsome. The women are remarkable for the strength and thickness of their limbs. Sometimes you meet with handsome, dark-haired, oval-faced, gracefully-formed females ; on inquiry you will generally find that they are foreign to the district ; that they are Mac-Loughlins from the North, for instance, or some such, who came into the country ‘ after the wars ! ’ ”

In 1839, in *Sketches in Erris and Tyrrawley*, and in 1841, in his *Tour in Connaught*, the Rev. Cæsar Otway, an Anglican clergyman, speaking of the fair of Killala, Mayo, says :— “ I love to look at a fair, to witness the cordial meetings and greetings of the kind-hearted people. I wish I had the art of affixing on canvas this or that most picturesque group, when I could pourtray not only the round and jocund faces (blessings on them !) of my country-women, but also the rich contrasts of colour in the costumes. Talk not to me of Swiss or German

costumes ; rather give me a Connaught lass, attired as I have just said, with her fair skin and ruddy cheek, her mirthful black eye, and her white teeth almost sparkling from her half-opened, good-natured, and large mouth. She is no beauty, to be sure—her head and form are Celtic, not Grecian ; but there she stands before a tent—a kind, laughter-loving, amiable *crathur*. I see her coquetting most intensely with Pat, and he is a *clean, comely, broad-shouldered, light-limbed, springy fellow*. He could run to Sligo and never draw breath ; he

could hurl and fight till the cows come home. An old, wrinkled body, Sally's aunt, no doubt, is standing watching the colleen. Such groups you may jot down in your sketch-book at Killala.

“ Binghamstown (in North-west Mayo) was full of people : Mass was over, yet hundreds were crowding round the chapel, for public baptism was going on, and all the parents and gossips in their best attire were awaiting the ceremony. Were I to judge from the appearance of the crowds I should suppose that the people of the Mullet were by no means in great or squalid poverty, and I was surprised that the miserable hovels, that on every side presented themselves, could turn out so many well-dressed people.

“ The people of Erris are pleasant, good-humoured, and good-natured, of great simplicity of character connected with shrewdness Very few men in Achill island wore hats ; their long glibs were their protection ; the women were in russet-brown wolsey gown, and madder-red short petticoat with yellow kerchief tied close to their heads. They are in the same state as they were a thousand years ago. They are as healthy and long-lived as any other people perhaps ; they must sometimes want medical aid, and yet there is not a doctor within thirty miles of them.

“ No race of men was ever known to have changed characters so rapidly as the Cromwellian settlers. The English always became more Irish than the Irish themselves ; but no race adopted the wild extravagant character of the Irish as the Cromwellians did. All the Erris families of settlers, twelve of whose names have come down to us, became Papists, except three out of the twelve families. The people of Erris are an amiable, confiding race, with the manners and habits of a thousand years ago.”

In 1840? Dr. Arnold, in his *History of Rome*, says of the (Mayo, Sligo, and Leitrim) labourers :— “ This statement was sent to Niebuhr by some Englishman, and Niebuhr, taking the fact for granted on his correspondent's authority, was naturally much perplexed by it. But had he travelled ever so rapidly through Wales or Ireland, or had he cast a glance on any of those groups of Irish labourers (from Connacht), who are constantly to be met with in the summer on all the roads in England, he would have at once perceived that his perplexity had been needless. Compared with the Italians, it would be certainly true, that the Celtic nations were generally both *light-haired and tall*. I should not have ventured to speak so confidently, merely from my own observation ; but Dr. Pritchard, who has for many years turned his attention to this question, assures me, *that he is perfectly satisfied as to the truth of the fact here stated ; to me it is only surprising that any one should have thought of disputing it.*”

In 1843, Count d'Avèze, a Frenchman, published *Un Tour en Irlande*. He says :— “ The women of Galway have oval faces, slightly hooked noses (*le nez arqué*), blue eyes and brown hair ; their skin is of wonderful whiteness ; their hands and feet are so small that they would excite the envy of Andalusian women. The men are also very remarkable ; they have handsome and strongly-marked features, eyes from which dart passionate and intelligent glances ; they are for the most part athletic and slender in build, and of noble bearing (*cavalièrement tournés*). They dress in quite Castilian fashion in their long patched carricks, and wear their hats over one ear. The peasants of the County of Mayo, and of Connacht generally, are handsome and strong, their features are well-defined (*accentués*), their looks proud and piercing, their whole bearing indicates vivacity and energy. It is in this out-of-the-way region that the artist will discover the purest types of the native race. The women have large almond-shaped eyes, aquiline noses, brown hair, which falls in waves over their strong shoulders. Those Irish women of the West have quite the Spanish cut of features, and, at the same time, the colour of a whiteness and transparency as delicate as that of English women, or of the other daughters of the North. In spite of their misery, which is only too evident, these women have in their attitude, in their gestures, in their gait, something noble and striking ; all their movements are

stamped with a graceful distinction which seems inborn. More than once I have been struck with astonishment in meeting, at a corner of a road, a poor girl moving on in quite a majestic manner, arrayed theatrically in her tattered clothes, carrying on her head an earthen jug, having for cortége a goat or a lamb, and walking bare-footed on stones with as much ease and dignity as a princess passing in a salon before her courtiers. While contemplating those poor women, for the moment, I confess that their titles of nobility seemed to radiate from their brows, and I gave way to the idea that they were really descended from the blood of kings.”

In 1844, Mr. Grant, an Englishman, in his *Impressions of Ireland*, says :—“ Nothing can be more extreme than the poverty of the peasants. Yet I never saw a set of finer looking children than those you meet with in the poorer districts. They far surpass in the comeliness of their little countenances the children of this country (England). I saw hundreds of them whom I thought perfect pictures from the regularity of their feature’s and the symmetry of their forms. It is true, as they advance in years, they lose the singular beauty which characterises them in early life. This is to be attributed to the hard destiny of their lives. Englishmen would perish in masses were they compelled to work as hard on such scanty food.”

In 1853, Sir Samuel Ferguson, in his sketch of the South Island of Aran, writes :—“ The islanders are a handsome, courteous, and amiable people. Whatever may be said of the advantages of a mixture of races, I cannot discern anything save what makes in favour of these people of the pure ancient stock, when I compare them with the mixed populations of districts on the mainland. The most refined gentleman might live among them in familiar intercourse, and never be offended by a gross or sordid sentiment. This delicacy of feeling is reflected in their figures, the hands and feet being small in proportion to the stature, and the gesture erect and graceful. The population consists principally of the three families or tribes of O’Flaherty, Joyce, and Conneely. ... To see the careful way in which the most has been made of every spot available for the growth of produce, might correct the impression so generally entertained and so studiously encouraged, that the native Irish are a thriftless people. Here, where they have been left to themselves, notwithstanding the natural sterility of their islands they are certainly a very superior population physically, morally, and even economically to those of many of the mixed and planted districts.”

In 1861, Dr. Beddoe, visited the Aran Islands of which, in his *Races of Britain*, he says :— “ The people of the Aran Isles, in Galway Bay, have their own very strongly-marked type, in some respects an exaggeration of the ordinary Gaelic one : the face being remarkably long, the chin very long and narrow, but not angular ; the nose long, straight, and pointed ; the brows straight, or rising obliquely outwards ; the eyes light, with very few exceptions ; the hair of various colours, but usually dark brown. They have nearly the same long-featured, long-headed type already spoken of as common in the Belgic region of Northern France. The inhabitants of Aranmore very much resemble each other. They are generally of good stature, with square shoulders, not very broad. Head inclining to be long and narrow ; convexity above not great. Forehead rather narrow, looks square from the front, but is gently rounded from other points of view ; brows straight or rising obliquely outwards, rather low. Eyes rather narrow, blue-grey, greyish blue, or dark grey. Hair in women abundant, in men not notably so ; of various colours, generally dark brown. Nose of good length, straight, pointed. Mouth of good size; often open, as in Irish generally. Chin very long, narrow, but not angular at extremity ; great length of jaw, with remarkably little curve. Cheek-bones somewhat prominent in front,”

In 1862, Coulter in his *West of Ireland*, wrote :— “ A writer lately tells of three emaciated creatures who ran after his car on the road from Oughterard to Clifden. The people seem steeped to the lips in poverty, but the children who ran barefooted, and not warmly clad, after Bianconi’s car, were plump, rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed, and in perfect health. And this is the case with the inhabitants of all Connemara. I have seen them in their houses, in their fields,

on the roads ; and, with the exception of their dress, I believe they may challenge comparison with the peasantry of any other county in Ireland as regards personal comeliness.

“ The men are, for the most part, tall, broad-shouldered, well-made fellows ; the young women good-looking, and often very handsome ; the children merry, active, intelligent little creatures. The middle-aged women do not retain their good-looks as long as in other parts of the country, probably from severe hard work and constant exposure to weather. The people are uncivilised, yet exceedingly quick, acute and penetrating, more so perhaps than other Irishmen.”

In 1872, Sir William Wilde, in his account of “ Lough Corrib,” wrote :— “ When we see the miserable sheep and cows, that eke out an existence among the rocks near Lough Corrib, we cannot help asking ourselves, how the light-haired, blue-eyed inhabitants, especially on Sunday and holiday, when cleaned for Mass, present such an amount of health and happiness, or why they remain in that region.”

M. Henri Martin, a Frenchman, said before the British Association in 1878 :—“ I have visited a part of the Counties of Galway and Mayo. I fancied I should find the majority of the people to be descendants of the Firbolgs ; I have seen on the contrary that the fair-haired, blue-eyed race predominates, and is much the more numerous.”

In 1882, Dr. Beddoe, of the London Anthropometric Committee, wrote :—“ Let us see what can be made of the popular solution of the matter—the theory that the Connaughters had degenerated under the influence of semi-starvation, until their kinsmen across the Shannon would no longer acknowledge the connection. This view was brought forward years ago by a writer in the *Dublin University Magazine*, and so forcible and graphic was the picture he drew of the dwarfish, pot-bellied, abortively-featured, prognathous ‘ spectres of a people, once able-bodied and comely, that haunted Sligo and Mayo,’ that it has been quoted by every monogenist writer at home and abroad ever since. The passage is *entirely a libel* on the natives of Eastern Sligo ; but as I never visited Mayo, I am not prepared to deny that it may be more applicable there. It does not apply to Con-nemara, where the people, though small, are well-built and well-favoured ; nor to Joyce’s and O’Flaherty’s country, near Galway, where they are notoriously tall. The military returns show that the Mayo people have the Irish colour-type in a high degree ; the people of Inishmurray (Sligo) are a decidedly fair race, and not uncomely.” According to Dr. Beddoe, out of 1,500 measured adult Irish recruits the naked mean height of 31 from Sligo was 67.26 inches, of 20 from Leitrim 66.99 inches, of 62 from Mayo 66.64 inches ; giving the average height of those 113 men = 66.96 inches.

In 1895, Dr. Browne, in his *Ethnography of the Mullet, Inishkea, and Portacloy*, in North Mayo, says :—“ In no part of these districts are the people of small stature, though a large number of them are descendants of dispossessed Ulster people. On the contrary, they appear to be taller and stouter than the inhabitants of the southern part of the country. A statement, [4] originally made by an anonymous writer, has somehow gained currency, and has been repeatedly quoted abroad, noticeably by M. de Quatrefages [5] and by M. Devay, [6] that the descendants of the Ulster people, driven two centuries ago into Sligo and Mayo, had dwindled into dwarfs of five feet two inches high, prognathous and pot-bellied. This most certainly does not apply to any section of the inhabitants of this part of Mayo, if, indeed, it were ever true of any part of the counties named, which repeated inquiries and personal observation agree in denying most positively. The statement is quite unsupported by other writers dealing with this region at the same time.

“ The people, on the whole, are good-looking, especially when young ; many of the girls and young women are very handsome, but they appear to age rapidly and early become wrinkled.

“ The men of this district are as a rule of fair average stature, very stoutly built, and broad-shouldered ; while there are few who can fairly be termed very tall, yet many reach a good height, and the proportion of small men is by no means large. The average stature of the 62 adult males measured was 1,725 mm., or about 5 feet 8 inches. The extremes were 1,628 mm. (5 feet 4 inches), and 1,820 mm., or about 5 feet 11½ inches.

“ The women seem to be more even in height than the men.

“ The head is generally well-shaped and is often of large size. The forehead is broad and upright (rarely receding), rounded away at the sides, and of fair height ; eye-brows thick and level.

“ The nose is short and has nearly always a cheek-bones, and is rather broader in the bigonial region than observed in either Aran or Inishbofin.

“ The nose is short and has nearly always a straight profile ; of the 62 men measured, 50 had straight, 8 sinuous, 2 aquiline, and 2 retroussé noses.

“ The wrinkles on the face are very deep, most so about the eyes and at the ‘ root’ of the nose, where there is often a raised fold of skin between two deep furrows. The mouth is large, with lips of medium thickness, often kept habitually apart when the face is at rest, but the large hanging lower lip is not so noticeable a character here as in other localities of the west coast.

“ The teeth are usually very short and even.

“ The chin is prominent, but not long, and the angles of the jaw are rather oblique.

“ The eyes, which are placed moderately wide apart, have irides of a light blue or bluish-grey, and being deep set and (in the fishermen) habitually half closed, they present to a casual observer the appearance of being small in size.

“ The complexion is either ruddy or pale, rarely sallow ; on exposure to the sun and wind it becomes a clear red, seldom freckling or turning brown.

“ The prevailing colour for the hair is dark brown, next in order of frequency is brown or chestnut, next black ; fair and red hair are comparatively scarce.

“ In the case of the Inishkea people, the most usual hair colour seems to be a clear brown, accompanied by reddish-brown beard and blue-grey eyes ; in these islands, also, there is a larger proportion of fair hair than on the mainland. The hair, and beard (when worn), are fairly abundant. Greyness does not appear to set in early.”

In his *Ethnography of Ballycroy*, North Mayo, Dr. Browne writes : — “ The general appearance of the people is rather pleasing, many of the men are handsome, and the women, too, are often good-looking, but, as observed in the reports on the other districts surveyed, both sexes seem to age rather rapidly, and some of the men become wrinkled very early.

“ The men are usually stoutly built, and of about the middle stature, though extremes, in this respect, are more common than observed in the Mullet or the Inishkea islands.

“ A few men of small stature were met with, and about an equal number of tall men.

“ The average height of the fifty men measured was 1,721 mm., or a little under 5 ft. 8 in., the extremes were 1,576 mm. (5 ft. 2 in.) and 1,838 mm. (6 feet.)

“ The shoulders are broad and square, and the upright carriage of many of the men is very noticeable.

“ The head is massive and well-shaped, usually broad just above the ears.

“ The forehead is broad, seldom receding, and not very high ; the skin is often a good deal wrinkled, even in comparatively young men, but not so much so as in the case of the fishing populations. The eye-brows overhang the eyes considerably, and are thick and rather level.

“ The face, though often long, is rather oblong in outline, owing to the breadth of the jaws in the bigonial region. The cheek-bones are, as a rule, prominent. The ridge or fold of skin at the root of the nose is not as common, nor when seen, of as large size as in the men of the fishing populations. The eyes have usually blue or light grey irides, seldom hazel or brown ; but it should be noted that the percentage of ‘ light’ eyes in adults, 78.7 (a much lower figure than observed in any of the districts yet reported on) shows a larger proportion of dark-eyed people in the population of Ballycroy.

“ The eyes are deeply set, and are placed rather wide apart ; there are often wrinkles around them, as is generally observable in the west. The eyelashes are dark and long.

“ The nose is straight usually, sometimes sinuous, seldom, aquiline, or *retroussé*. The mean nasal-index is 63.9.

“ The mouth is large, and the lips of medium thickness. The teeth are, when not spoiled by excessive smoking, small, white, and very even. The angles of the jaw are rather pronounced and square, which gives an oblong outline to the face when viewed from the front.

“ The complexion is fair or ruddy, seldom freckling ; sallowness is not common, even in those with dark eyes. As noted in other sections, wrinkles seem to come rather early.

“ The hair is usually a dark brown ; next, in order of frequency, come the lighter shades of brown ; then black, which is commoner here than in the Mullet ; then fair, and lastly red. The growth of the hair is fairly abundant, it is often wavy or curly. The beard is usually somewhat lighter in colour than the hair of the scalp, and, if allowed to grow naturally, seems to have, in many cases, a tendency to fork at the end.

“ The foregoing description is, of course, a general one, applying only to the prevailing type ; there is, however, a second type not infrequently met with, the chief characters of which are, long oval face, with but slightly marked angles to the jaws, less prominent cheek bones and sharper features.

“ The figure seems to be slighter in youth, but to exhibit a tendency to put on flesh with advancing years. The hair, in this type, is usually lighter owing to admixture.

“ Though there are some men of small stature in the community, there are also some above the middle height, and the majority are of about the middle stature.

“ As this is *the* district of County Mayo, inhabited by a colony of Ulster origin, it may not be out of place to repeat here what was written about people of similar origin in the Mullet, that there appears to be no foundation whatever for the statement made originally by an anonymous writer, and quoted repeatedly since by several writers both in this country and

abroad, to the effect that the descendants of the dispossessed Ulster tribes, who settled in the counties of Sligo and Mayo, have through intermarriage and deficient food dwindled to an average height of five feet two inches, and become prognathous, pot-bellied, and utterly degenerate. As before stated, the average stature of the fifty men whom I had measured was 1,721 mm., or barely under 5 ft. 8 in. ; no selection whatever was practised beyond excluding some ungrown young lads ; and this average is perhaps a little below the true figure, as it was said by several of the people that most of the best grown men were away working as migratory labourers in England. Only three men whose height was less than five feet three and a half inches were met with, and they seemed to be exceptional cases. Only one dwarf is known in the district.”

“ Inisturk and Clare Island, Co. Mayo. 56 men were on an average 5 feet $7\frac{1}{8}$ inches ; of head large and well formed, long face, nose straight or sinuous, sometimes *retroussé*, chin square and prominent, not prognathous ; complexion fair and ruddy ; eyes blue and light grey. In 112 men and women there was no red hair, 12.50 per cent, fair hair, 40.84 brown, 34.76 dark hair, 9.46 per cent, black.”

In his *Ethnography of (the islands of) Garumna and Leitirmullen*, in the County Galway, but opposite Mayo, Dr. Browne says they contain “ probably the poorest and the most primitive population in Ireland.” The people are well developed and good-looking. The mean height of the sixty-five adult men measured was 1,739 metres, or 5 feet $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches ; the extremes were 5 feet 5 inches and 6 feet 1 inch ; eight of them were 5 feet 11 inches and upwards ; the build is stout and square, with great depth of chest and muscular strength, far above the average. Their lifting power is especially great ; they are very hardy, and capable of bearing a great deal of hunger, fatigue and wet. The women seem to be above the average height, and are very stout and strong, one young maiden of 18 was 5 feet 10 inches.

The head is well-shaped, the forehead upright ; the face of medium length, with prominent cheek-bones ; the nose is straight, generally long and sharply pointed, often aquiline. The mouth is not large, the lips are of medium thickness ; the teeth are good, sound and even ; the eyes light-blue or blue-grey, seldom green or brown ; the ears small and well-shaped, and very few abnormalities were observed. The skin rather fair, sometimes ruddy, and turns to clear red. The hair is usually a light brown, next in order of occurrence dark brown, then fair ; black and red hair infrequently met with, genuinely black hair is very rare. The hair is usually wavy, very often curly. The people are, as a rule, robust, stout, hardy, wonderfully healthy. “ Certain diseases (which I do not care to mention, E. H.), such as (X and Y) are unknown. The people are sober, the women seldom or never take liquor. Only two cases of illegitimacy have occurred in the last twenty years. They are very devout in the practices of their religion, and family affection is a marked trait in their character.” [7]

In 1891 Marie-Anne de Bovet, a French lady in her *Trois Mois en Irlande*, p. 340, says of the people of Achill, Co. Mayo : “ The men and women are generally handsome and well built, with that fineness of type (*finesse de type*), ease of manners, carelessness of attitudes, of gestures, and gait, to which the Irish peasant is indebted for the fact, that he is never vulgar. Do we not see here a mark of their southern origin ?”

Oral evidence collected by me in Dublin and elsewhere. As far as it is anonymous, or that of persons since dead, its value depends on the accuracy of my reports of the statements made to me. Yet I have a voucher, to some extent, for that accuracy in Mr. Frederick Ryding, of 95 Merrion Square, West. This gentleman has sharp sight, is a keen observer, takes an intense interest in ethnography, has been, like myself, in various parts of Europe ; by the long practice of his profession he ought to know more about jaws, noses, and faces than Beddoe, Topinard, or Virchow ; besides he is an accurate amateur portrait painter. He came with me on one or more of my rounds of inspection. We visited a steamer which conveys the harvest-

men to and from England, and were informed by the captain that they were “ about 67 inches in height, of fair or sandy hair, a few red, and a few black ;” and by the mate, who said they carried thousands of them, that they were “ like other people in England and Ireland, but not so well dressed, and of fairer hair and complexion.” The Captain of another vessel told us that they were 68 or 67 inches high ; and two of his crew, who had been going with harvest-men for twenty years, said they “ were 67 or 68 inches high, of fair, or auburn, or dusty-coloured hair, and no red.”

According to the anonymous writer in the *Dublin University Magazine*, of December, 1836 :—“ It is not necessary to travel out of Dublin to study in this school. From June till August our quays are a commodious class-room. A hundred professors of spare diet may here be found any day in the week . . . five feet two upon an average,” etc. Well, I have made it my business for some years to look at thousands of those ‘ professors of spare diet,’ as he calls the Connacht harvesters. I have looked at them in their native places, at the Broadstone Station, along the streets and quays, and in the ships which take them over to England. From my careful observation, I judged that the mean height of the full-grown labourers of Mayo, Sligo, and Leitrim is over 67 inches.”

As soon as I saw the statement of the *Dublin University Magazine* I went to the late Sir John Lentaigne, Inspector of Prisons, who knew Ireland well. He said it was a gross misrepresentation, and asked me to go with him to Mr. Burke, Under Secretary for Ireland, a Connacht man, with whom he had an appointment. Mr. Burke, whom we met at his house in Westland Row, said the whole thing was absurd ; he laughed at the words which I read to him, or at me, I did not know which. [8] Then I went to Sir William Wilde, who lived close by in Merrion Square, and who had written much on Irish ethnography. He said : “ Johnny Gray (Sir J. Gray) and I are from that part of the world ; he is from Claremorris (Mayo), and I am from Castlereagh. Ask Gray, and ask the *Eagle* of the *Fág an bealachs* ; I tell you what, the Mayo men are so far from being a degraded race, that you could find in that one county more men fit to be Lord Chancellors than in all the other counties of Ireland put together. Come and dine with me to-day and we’ll talk the matter over with some friends.” I could not accept the invitation. I did not ask Sir J. Gray ; but I asked the *Eagle* of the *Fág an bealachs*, a famous Mayo regiment, and I give its evidence on pages 153-158.

A group of six Dublin carmen, who for years saw thousands of the reapers pass through the streets in numerous bodies, “ agreed among themselves that some are small, some six feet high, but the run of them is between 5 feet 7 and 5 feet 8, and fine, hardy men, better than ourselves.” Several railway porters at Broadstone Station, who had seen thousands upon thousands of them, being asked separately, gave the heights 5f. 8, 5f. 7½, 5f. 7, 5f. 6¾, 5f. 6, 5f. 8½, 5f. 9 inches. Several loungers (some of whom were ex-soldiers) and coal-porters on the quays, gave the heights as from 5f. 5 to 5f. 10. A policeman, who had been stationed on or near the North Wall for fourteen years, said :—“ They are smaller than the County Dublin men, but I would not admit that they are not as good as the City of Dublin people ; they look queer on account of their dress, but are fine, hardy men ; of fair hair, a few of red, and a few of dark hair.” One of the harvesters, who was a well-built man, about 5 f. 10 high, told me that “ about 5 f. 8 was the height of the *weight* [9] of them.”

Mr. Ward, Instructor of Drill to the Dublin Metropolitan Police, said : “ The Mayo men could not possibly be under 5 feet 5 inches ;” Serjeant-Major Robert Jackson of the N. Mayo Militia, said the average was 5 feet 7 inches. The Rev. Maxwell Close, M.R.I.A., who, during a residence of fifteen years in England had seen Connacht men there every year, said they were about 5 feet 7 inches ; Mr. Larmenie, who was intimately acquainted with Mayo, says the labourers are 5 feet 7 or 8 inches.

Mr. James Barmingham, Surveyor of Buildings :—“ The men of Erris and Tyrawly are about 5 feet 7 inches, the women 5 feet 4 inches. Intelligent and careful observers inform Fr. Kelly, P.P., Tulsk, that the height of the peasants in North Mayo and Sligo is about 5 feet 9 inches. The Messrs. Morris, of 68 Harcourt Street, Building Surveyors, have had opportunities of knowing the physical characteristics of the peasants of all parts of Ireland, and they affirmed that the Mayo and Sligo people are about 5 feet 7 or 8 inches, well-built, and fair-featured. While they were telling me this, at the Rosses near Sligo, they pointed out to me a young fisherman casually passing by, who was one of the handsomest and finest men I ever beheld. Mr. Lamb, an English gentleman, who knows Sligo well, says the people are about 5 feet 8 inches, and “ decidedly handsome.” Mr. Delany, who has charge of the tramcars at Nelson’s Pillar, and was formerly in the Metropolitan Police, says : “ I am looking at those labourers for thirty-seven years as they pass through Dublin, and I think they are from 5 feet 6 inches to 6 feet, and about 5 feet 8 inches on an average.” But to be brief, I have at various times during many years asked the opinion of about forty of the Metropolitan Police of the C and D divisions, of fifteen Serjeants of constabulary in Dublin and Kildare, at Clifony, Grange, Breagh, and Mullaghmore in Sligo ; of Bunduff, Tullaghan, and Kinloch in Leitrim. I have consulted 16 carmen, 16 railway officials and guards, 10 loungers or corner boys, some of whom had been soldiers, 20 civilians, etc., and these persons, in number about 140, gave the heights as about 5 feet 6¾ , 5 feet 7 inches, 5 feet 7½ inches, 5 feet 8 inches, 5 feet 8½ inches, and 5 feet 9 inches. I asked each of them my own height (which I knew) to ascertain if he was competent to judge, and finding him fairly so I entered down his estimate. The average, as to the Mayo men, was about 5 feet 7¾ inches. Very few said 5 feet 9 inches, and one said 5 feet 6 inches.

I now proceed to give some *striking* proofs that the labourers, “ harvesters,” “ reapers,” and “ spailpins” of Mayo, Leitrim, and Sligo are well over five feet two inches high. These men and their brother Connachtmen of Galway and Roscommon formed the 87th Royal Irish Fusiliers and the 88th Connaught Rangers. Wherever the 87th or the 88th charged one or more of Napoleon’s “ invincible” regiments, it made “ smithereens” of them, “ twice saved the allied armies,” and thus proved itself to be at least equal in “ form” and physique to any regiment of any country whatever.

The 87th, which got 571 Mayo recruits in 1805, is nicknamed “ The Fogs,” from the Irish battle-cry, *Fág an bealach* (Leave the way !) with which it charged the French at Barrosa, and is named “ The Eagles,” from its having been the first (and the last?) to capture one of Napoleon’s Eagles : — “ At Barrosa, says Sir William Napier in his *History of the Peninsular War*, the 87th Royal Irish Fusiliers closed eagerly with the French, and by a rapid, animated, fierce, and prolonged charge overthrew the first line, dashed it violently against the second, and broke both by the shock, making them suffer immensely, taking a howitzer, killing the colonel, and capturing the Eagle of Napoleon’s favourite 8th regiment. At Tarifa the 87th were fiercely assailed by a French column ; but, says Wellington, ‘ though comparatively a small number, they made the enemy retire with disgrace infinitely to the honour of our brave troops.’ ”

With these deeds before him, the poet, Charles Philips, having praised in verse the Irish generals, Wellington, Hutchinson, Spencer, Cole, Beresford, and Pack, addresses the colonel of the 87th :—

“ And thou, brave, laughter-loving Doyle,
 Pure symbol of thy native soil,
 Long may’st thou lead thy hero band,
 Guards of their Prince, and glories of their land.”

General Graham, who commanded at Barrosa, wrote to Wellington :— “ A most determined charge by three companies of Guards, and the 87th Regiment, supported by the remainder of the left wing, decided the fate of General Laval’s Division. The Eagle of the 8th Regiment of Infantry, *which suffered immensely*, [10] and a howitzer rewarded this charge, and remained in possession of Major Gough (who commanded the 87th), the *animated charges* of the 87th were *most conspicuous*.” Wellington replied [11] :—“ I beg to congratulate you, and the brave troops under your command, on the signal victory. If your attack had not been a most vigorous one, the whole allied army would have been lost ; but you may console yourself with the reflection that you did your utmost, and at all events saved the allied army. I most sincerely congratulate you, and the brave troops under your command, on your success.”

General Graham wrote to Doyle, the colonel of the 87th :—“ March 5th, 1811. Dear Doyle, your regiment has covered itself with glory (at Barrosa) ; recommend it, and its commander to the Prince Regent ; too much cannot be done for it.” Its Irish commander, Gough, led the 87th to victory at Talavera, Barrosa, Vittoria (where they captured the baton of Marshal Jourdan), Tarifa, Nivelles ; he was the first officer that ever received brevet rank for services performed in the field in command of a regiment. As Commander-in-Chief in India, he won the battles of Maharajpore, Moodkee, Ferozeshah, Sabraon, and Guzerat. But because his victory of Chillianwallah was doubtful, or cost 2,357 fighting men and 89 officers, he was railed at in England for his “ Tipperary tactics.” His motto, and that of his family, is *Fág an bealach !* the charging shout of the 87th.

Of this celebrated regiment Lieutenant John Skipp, an Englishman, who rose from the ranks, thus speaks in his Memoirs :—“ I must confess I do love to be on duty of any kind of service with the Irish. There, is a promptness to obey, an hilarity, a cheerful obedience and willingness, which I have rarely met with in any other body of men. But, whether in this particular case, these qualifications were instilled into them by the rigid discipline of their corps, I know not, or whether these are the characteristics of the Irish nation. But I have also observed in that corps (I mean the 87th or Prince’s Own Irish) a degree of liberality amongst the men, I have never seen in any other corps, a willingness *to share their crust and drop* on service with their comrades, an *indescribable cheerfulness in obliging and accommodating each other*, and an anxiety to serve each other, and to hide each others faults. In that corps there was a unity I have never seen in any other, and as for fighting they were very devils. During the Peninsular War some General observed to Wellington how unsteadily that corps marched. The noble Duke replied ‘ Yes, General, they do indeed, but they fight like devils.’ So they always will, while they are Irish. In some situations they are, perhaps, too impetuous ; but if I know anything of the service, this is a fault on the right side ; and what at the moment was thought rashness and *madness* has gained old England many a glorious victory.”

At the battle of Busaco, the 45th regiment was on the very brink of being annihilated. The Connacht Rangers rushed to their assistance, and both precipitated themselves into the midst of a French column composed of the 2nd, 4th, 36th, regiments, and they completely overthrew them. Wellington was looking on, he galloped up to the 88th, shook hands with its colonel, and said : “ Wallace, I never saw a more gallant charge than that of your regiment.”

At Fuentes d’Onor the 24th, 71st, and 79th regiments were pierced and overpowered by Drouet’s division, the 9th regiment of which had penetrated even to a short distance of the British line, and were about to debouch on its centre. The British were worn out, their ammunition was gone, and they were about to retire. Wellington came in that dreadful hour, the most perilous of the whole war, and the Connacht Rangers were let loose at the French. They went in double quick time, were cheered by the British troops, but they gave no cheer in return ; and they were saluted by a heavy fire from a French battery of eight pounders, and

from the French infantry. But at a sign from Grattan they gave a cheer, and made so overwhelming a charge on the 9th regiment, and some hundreds of the Imperial Guards, that they lifted some of them from the ground in the shock, and bore them back some paces in the air, and drove them all from the village with universal loss.”

These Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim, Galway, and Roscommon men were not picked men, for E. Bulwer-Lytton says that at that period “ two-thirds of the British army were Irish, and the lowest of them, the dregs of the Irish populace. What a reflection !” [12] Well, the reflection that a person must make is that the dregs of Irishmen who twice, at least, saved “ the allied armies,” and drove the French out of Spain, must not have been “ five feet two high, pot-bellied, and bow-legged.” I am sure the French heroes of a hundred fights must have had a different opinion driven in on them, and the countrymen of de Quatrefages would not admit that the men who were opposed to the 87th and 88th, that is, their 8th, 9th, 2nd, 4th, and 36th regiments and their Guards, would “ leave the way” for men of inferior form and strength. I have not given these two illustrations of “ the form” of Connacht-men by way of boasting, or in disparagement of the French. I have lived in France for seven years, and I had close relations, for at least one year, with their foot and horse soldiers, and I could not but admire them. I chiefly, or merely, brought these facts forward to show the utter absurdity of the statements made by the anonymous writer in the *Dublin University Magazine*.

- [1] Races of Britain, pp. 27, 142, 298, 266, and vol. iii. of Memoirs of the Anthropological Society, p. 569, et seq. I don't know now the precise page.
- [2] For instance, *The Saxon in Ireland* ; or, *Rambles of an Englishman in Search of a Settlement in the West of Ireland*, London, John Murray, 1851.
- [3] In *Erris and the Western Highlands*, pp. 105, 112, 120, 123.
- [4] *Dublin University Magazine*, No. 48, p. 658.
- [5] *L'Unité de l'Espèce Humain*, ii., 316.
- [6] Devay, Fr., *Du Danger des Mariages consanguins sous le Rapport Sanitaire*.
- [7] *Proceedings of the R.I. Academy*, May, 1899, pp. 223-245.
- [8] This Mr. Burke and Lord Frederick Cavendish were murdered in the Phoenix Park.
- [9] This seems a bull, but it stands for the Irish similar word *an mhéid*, which means bulk, quantity, number ; *ca mhéid* means how many, how much ?
- [10] The context shows who inflicted the suffering.
- [11] Wellington's *Depatches*.
- [12] *England and the English*. Vol. I., p. 87.

The Irish people. Their height, form, and strength (1899)

Author : Hogan, Edmund, 1831-1917

Subject : Anthropometry — Ireland

Publisher : Dublin : Sealy, Bryers & Walker

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : MSN

Book contributor : University of California Libraries

Collection : cdl ; americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/irishpeopletheir00hogaiala>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

November 21 2011