

*A tour in Connaught : comprising sketches of Clonmacnoise, Joyce country, and Achill*

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(1839)

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Joyce Country.

Road to Joyce country—Lough Mask—Its great beauty—Lough Corrib—Full of holy islands—Drive along the Lake—Castle Hen—Inquiry concerning it—Description of my informant—Her legend—The O'Flahertys and Joyces—Maam Inn—Alexander Nimmo and his brother—Another description of Castle Hen, and story—A driver's cruelty—Thomassheen's revenge—Lac na Fecheen—Awful consequences—Driver's destruction—A ruxion at a fair Thomassheen's retreat—Another account of Castle Hen—Population and state of Joyce country—Anecdote of a potteen smuggler—Another smuggler story, to keep the first company, and which casts a light on Connaught and its gentry fifty years ago.

THE road from Cong to Maam Inn passes over the ridge of high land that divides Lough Mask from Lough Corrib, and you see the best and most picturesque ends of both waters.

Across Lough Mask you see a succession of lofty and variously formed mountains, with all their glens and gorges, and pushing out their great shoulders into the lake ; and you see wooded islands and grey cliffs, and between two dark headlands a long lonely inlet running far away amongst the hills, up which you desire to sail and to explore, where, no doubt, are sweet solitary vales untrodden *yet* by guides and tourists ; and then on the other side, towards the south, the broad expanse of Lough Corrib, the second largest lake in Ireland—a water thirty miles in length, flat and uninteresting, no doubt, in some places, as indeed almost all Irish and Scotch lakes are where their superfluity is discharged by some river—but up here to the north, having the mountains of Connemara, and Joyce country to the west, and very lofty hills that rise to the east, and separate it from the Galway lowlands—it is, in truth, a noble sheet of water, here and there studded with islands—some large and fertile, others rugged rocks—some embattled with the ruins of an old fortress some made holy by the crumbling remains of a still older church, where some Culdee made his desert—a disciple of Columba or Fursey, or Fechin his retreat. If such a lake as this were in Scotland, or indeed any where else in Europe, it would be covered with steam boats and yachts ; and there would be hotels and accommodation on its shores—and a country as rich, if not richer, than Cumberland would be opened out and planted and built on—but here all is left to nature's waste, and except a planted island, that we a minute before saw on Lough Mask, (belonging to Lord Leitrim, I believe,) the whole seems no more improved than if it were Van Dieman's Land we were travelling through.

The drive along the northern shore of Lough Corrib is really very fine—for looking across the water, studded as it is with many islands, you have before you the Connemara mountains, in all the variety of their forms—by and by you come to where the lake narrows and assumes the form of a broad inlet, like the estuary of a large river; and just at the entrance is an island covered almost entirely, so small is it, with the ruins of a noble castle, having four round towers as flankers. It put me in mind of Lochleven Castle in Scotland, but it is a much finer ruin.

It was now getting dusky, and though the lake and the mountains, and the fine island and castle looked grand, perhaps grander in their indistinctness, yet I would have been glad to have seen this scene in a clearer light. I was anxious to inquire about the castle, and therefore

stopped at a range of cabins that stood in all their low dirty wretchedness on the roadside, and saluting the inmates, as I always do, with the usual Irish accost—" God save all here," out came a young woman with a child in her arms, and a better specimen of a fine Irish woman of the lower class I think I have not often seen. There was a freshness in her complexion, and a laughing lustre in her eye, that made her otherwise irregular features very comely ; and her figure was so light, her step so elastic and yet firm, that she seemed admirably adapted to be the mother of a fine race of men.

In answer to many questions, she, with a sort of suppressed smile, said she did not know. The Irish never like to answer questions until they see what is the drift of the interrogator ; but when I expressed admiration at the beauty of the country, and the fine position of the old fortress, and how sorry I was that I could not know any thing about it, she then said, " Och for that matter she'd tell me and welcome all she ever heard about it, but how could the likes of her know any thing for sartain ? The place was called Castle Hen, and all the neighbours said that it was built by a witch, who came there one night when the Joyces were driving the old residents, the O'Flahertys, out of the country—and she appeared on the little island with a black hen following her, which all allowed must not be nathural ; but, at any rate, before morning, up sprung that great building—and then she gave it to king O'Flaherty and the hen along with it ; and she told him to take good care of the hen, for that when the Sassenach besieged him, and with their boats would be keeping off all provisions from him, the black hen would lay white eggs enough to keep him from starving ; and so it was the Joyces often besieged it, and tried, when they could not take it by force, to starve out the O'Flaherty, but the eggs kept him alive. But sure enough, one Easter Sunday, after a long lent, the master, poor man, was mighty craving for a bit of meat ; and indeed, I suppose, the potteen had got into his head ; any how, he could'nt be in his right mind, for he takes the hen, do you see, cuts her throat, boils her for his dinner—and a heavy dinner it was for him—for, from that day forth he had neither luck nor grace ; the Joyces soon surrounded the place with their boats—not a morsel of meal or meat would they let near it ; and you see that as the black hen was no more, he could have no eggs, and then he had to give up the last hold of the O'Flahertys in this place—he had to quit before the Joyces, and go to the wild country beyond Mamturc, and the twelve pins."

" I suppose," said I, " as you know so much about the O'Flahertys that you are come of that people."

" No, in troth, sir, I am more akin to the Joyces—my father and mother were both of that name."

" So I thought," says I.

" And what reason has your honour to know any thing about the likes of me ?"

I did not choose to say that her complexion, her figure, and her light blue eye, bespoke the Saxon cross, that had produced a finer sort of *animal*.

The road now ran along a broad serpentine river that wound through a valley, on each side of which were ranged mountain after mountain, all pretty nearly of the same height, all standing like a regiment of soldiers, of the one size and uniform, dressed as in line—right shoulders forward, guarding the deep long glen. These hills seemed extremely improvable—the sides were grassy and very pasturable—the boggy parts very reclaimable, like, though not quite so rocky or lofty as most of the sheep farms in the highlands of Scotland.

After a drive of a few miles along that fine glen we arrived at Maam Inn, where we found every attention that was possible, and very good accommodations, considering the loneliness of its position.

This house was originally built by Mr. Nimmo, the engineer, when occupied in laying out the new roads through this heretofore almost impassable district. Since his death a respectable person, formerly in Mr. Nimmo's employment, holds it as an inn, and gives universal satisfaction by his urbanity, and endeavours to afford accommodation to all that call. I found a brother of my old friend Alexander Nimmo here ; a valetudinarian, whose state of health had forced him to retire from active business—I found in him much of the information and ability of his brother, and he seemed intimately acquainted with this western district, and quite alive to its great capabilities. From him I got another version of the story of Castle Hen, and the cause of its having that name ; and also much information concerning the immediate neighbourhood. But for the *present* I will pass by his matter-of-fact statements, and give the reader the more picturesque description of a young friend who is intimately acquainted with this country. He thus describes the northern parts of Lough Corrib, Castle Hen, &c. &c. of all which he seems to have a perfect knowledge, and is acquainted not only with the phraseology but the turns of thought of the people.

“ I never saw more beautiful scenery than this,” were the rapturous expressions that involuntarily escaped the lips of a pedestrian tourist who stopped to take breath as he gained the summit of the last craggy eminence over which the new road from the village of Cong passes through the mountains on its way to Maam, [1] the only accessible entrance into that part of the west of Ireland denominated “ Joyce Country.” The road from this descends very rapidly over a succession of secondary hills, till it reaches the new bridge that spans the river of Beal-na-brack, [2] as it empties itself into the upper lake of Lough Corrib, which lies immediately beneath the spot on which our traveller has seated himself, and along whose sloping bank the road leads to the white-slatted house that is perched, like the end of a martello tower, at this side of the bridge, “ The Corrib Hotel,” [3] where our traveller and his companion, who, preferring the water-view of this scenery, had taken a boat from Cong, are to meet for the night. The opposite side of the lake washes the base of Laucavran, which now throws his dark shadow half across its calm waters, giving it that peculiarly sombre tint that tells you evening is approaching ; in the distance the Connemara and Joyce country mountains bound the horizon, with their blue tops accurately defined, against the pinkish sky that marks the declining sun. Although the lake was smooth and tranquil as a mirror now, yet an occasional scud would ruffle its silver bosom in long wavering lines, as some fitful gust would rush down one of the mountain gorges by which it is surrounded.

One solitary rock raises its head in almost the centre of the water, on which stand the remains of an old castle that adds much to the beauty and romance of the view, and upon which the traveller's eyes now rested, as his guide, a bare-legged gossoon from ‘ beyant the wather,’ was making a most accurate investigation of the contents of a horn of Honor Casey's potteen from the bridge of Cornamona.

Being perfectly satisfied as to the purity of the liquid, (that is, its containing no water, viteril, or parlimint,) he drew a long breath, smacked his lips, wiped them by performing a circuitous revolution round three inches of his mouth with a tongue of no ordinary dimensions, much in the same manner that a cow licks her nose. He screwed up the left side of his face into a paralytic grin, by bringing into very close contiguity the corners of his mouth and eye, and finishing by leisurely drawing the back of his bony hand across his unshorn mug, he commenced :

“ Ah ! then, may be your honour doesn't know that's t Chrislane-a-Kirca? ” “ No, indeed, my man, and what old ruin is it, may I ask ? ” “ Och ! then, I was just thinking as much an' it isn't every body could tell you about that same. Sure it's one of Grania's ould castles, an' a fine antiant place it is.” “ I dare say it is, but what may be the meaning of that long, oulandish name ? ” “ The manin', your honour ! I'll tell you that 'tis the Hen's Castle.” The Hen's Castle” “ How strange what an odd name ! pray was it saved by the cackling of one, like the goose in the capitol of Rome ? ” “ A capital room, your honour, och then there was, an' a

many a room, I'm sure, an' a big bawn [4] in in in the middle of it 'tis fine times thim O'Flaherty's had of it, the murthering thieves an' plenty of geese too, your honour, I'll be bail though sarragh one bud it's a cowld an' a lonesome place enough now myself does'nt know how thim lives in it at all, at all." " You surely don't mean to say that it is inhabited?" " Ah ! then to be sure it is doesn't Thomassheen Rua [5] and his mother live in it ? " " Rather a cold, bleak place to live in, certainly," said the gentleman, in a musing tone. " Why then your honour's not far out there eather 'tis cowld enough, in troth but she's a lone widdy, that was dispossessed jist three years agin Patreckmass nixt, by that ould curmudgeon Anthony Skinflint, me lord's agint, [6] a sweet bad luck to him for a nagur because as how, you see, Thomassheen wouldn't give a day's duty to the driver futtin' the turf [7] more oetoken sarragh day's luck the same man had since, an' what's more, he never will, I'm sure an' sartin, nor any body else that had the same turn done to thim an' they in the wrong. The Lord betune us and harm this blessed evenin' but I'm thinkin' the same stone isn't right."

The stranger's curiosity was so much awakened by these mysterious hints, and the guide's most devoutly crossing himself, that he forgot all further inquiries about the old castle to know the particulars of the driver's disaster.

" Wait a minit, your honour, till I kindle the pipe, an' I'll tell ye all about it, an' it's many a time I hard tell of the same stone from Cathreena na Month, [8] me unkle Jim's brother's shisthur, God be marcifal to her sowl this night—Amin.

" Well it's there behind ye upon the top of Benlevi sure, the whole country round knows the place." [9] " Yes, but what is this place you speak of, or what has that to do with the driver?" " Asy yet, your honour, sure it's the Lac Fecheen I'm telling you of—a great big stone that's lying there, like a grave stone—and nobody yet could tell how it came, or who brought it ; but there it is, sure enough, as if it fell out of the sky, for all the world so whiniver any two factions has a fallin'-out, or the villages bees quarrelling among themselves, or any of the neighbours does have a bickerin' about the mearins, or the likes—an' that Shaun Justice, [10] or Shaun a Bawnia, doesn't settle betwixt them, or that one of them bees a tinant, or clewin [11] of the MAGISTRATES, an' they get no satisfaction at the court, or may be it's two of the Colloughs that would be belyin' other, or spreadin' bad reports of any of the little girls, an' sayin' they were not better than they ought to be, or no matter what 'ud be the rason of it. Well, whin the cojutor, or Father Mike himself, wouldn't be able to make pace atween them, then ye see, it's the devil mysel thinks that 'ud be a timptin' thim ; but howsomdever one of thim' id go to the Lac Fecheen an' turn it upon the other in the name of the dioul, (Lord save us,) an' prayin' that they might have *his* curse, an' the curse of the Lac Fecheen upon thim afore that day twelvemonth, an' thin he'd turn the stone upside down. An' as sure as you'r a livin' man there this blessed evenin', whoever was a-roguin' the other, eather himself or some one belongin' to him 'ud surely die—or, if none of the people died itself, the cattle 'ud get the dry murrain—or the smut 'ud be on the corn—or maybe it's the barn that 'ud take fire, or some other bad luck 'ud happen to thim for sartin—so it's two eyes worse nor the court, or the skull, [12] or the priest himself, barrin' he put out the candles upon ye."

" Did Thomassheen turn this fatal stone?"

" Entroth an' he did, your honour, for sure an' sartin, go an' turn it upon him an' it wasn't long after till the milsh cow got into the afther-grass, an was atin' it till she fairly burst, your honor, an' she only within six months of calvin'—an' sarragh one of it stopt there, for the shurroft [13] followin' his shusthur's child—a young gorlough [14] in the cradle, died of the small-poc, that Shaun Airough, the Knock-a-latin doctor, gave it—an' sure we all know that no one ever died after the same man's lucky hand afore or since ; bud 'twas jist the curse of the Lac Fecheen that was upon him—he be to go—an' that wasn't all, for he tuck to liquor, an' grew so mortal fond of it that he began to try his hand at the distillin', an' all the tinints were aforced to give him a lock of corn, or he'd be drivin' an' poundin' every other day [15]—well divil a bit bud he was goin' on ever, ever at the whiskey, till they cotched him in the

long run—for one fine Sunday's mornin', a week afore Lint, jist as the neighbours were clenin' themselves for airy mass, such a phillaloo-murther-shout as we hard. An' who should be a comin' down the Hill of Farah bud thim bloody-willians the rivenew peelers' (thim putteen huzzah's, as his rav'rence calls thim,) an' sazed every thing, he had in the wide world, tatterin', an' tarin' every where, t' would bring the tears in your two eyes to see thim makin smithereens of the darlin' fine copper still, an' dancin' upon it in the middle of the road. They took the driver off to Galway till they lodged him in the stone-jug, bekase as how he was so bastly drunk that he couldn't run away like the rist of thim. An' sure myself was med a preznor of too, and I only standin' in the still-house doin' nothin' at all, only lestin' to Maurteen Brannagh, the dishtiller, tellin' about the roocaun [16] that was in Gurtnaclossagh the last coort day, an' 'tis well I ever got out of the same chaps, only the masther, long life to him, had the captain to dine wid him, when they came to swear agin us, an' he let me off."

" Well, but what became of the driver when he got out of imprisonment !"

" The driver—little good, your honour, for it's worsen and worsen he got 'till he was fairly on the shoughraune, an' aforced to give up entirely. He had'nt the rint, an' the land was goin' to the bad, an in the long run he had to cut his stick—for he hadn't a pin's pint in the varsal world—so comin' on harvist he wint away to England as a spalpeen with his traheens [17] upon his arms, an' his farleys [18] upon his back, lavin' the wife to keep house till he came home agin. Bud ould Anthony was too cute for them for he wint an' sould all the poor crathurs had. Ay in troth, from the skeehogue [19] that the born infant was in to the blankit that was over thim, pots an' all an' she had to take the bag and is beggin' the world now so you see what it is to have the curse of the Lac Fecheen upon a one."

" And what brought this Thomassheen, as you call him, to live in the old castle ?"

" Jist this, plaze your honour. Bud I'm thinkin' that we hav' a better be movin' on atowards the lodge [20] for it's gettin' late i an' tish't clear to me bud we'll have a hard night of it—look at the squall that's comin' out of the gap foreinst ye—an' we'll be talkin' along—people say it shortens the road." It was full time to go. The sun had sunk down behind the hills, and the lake, that heretofore presented an almost unruffled surface, in a few minutes became white with foam, as the wind rushed from the lower lake thro' the narrow pass with such fury as to lash the waves for many feet up the walls of the old castle, while the upper part of the lake was as smooth as when it first struck the stranger's view—a rough white crest, like a wall, defining the extent of the squall as it broke upon the placid water, and already as it reached the utmost limit of the lake at Maam it was becoming calm and smooth, as the swell it left rolled slow and measured to the pebbly shore at its margin. This is no uncommon event here, the height of the hills surrounding these lakes, and the frequency of the valleys and ravines collecting the wind and allowing it to rush over the lake in detached squalls make sailing here very dangerous at times. The water may be perfectly smooth one moment and the next a perfect hurricane. Sometimes these squalls will be accurately circumscribed, not covering a surface of more than a few hundred yards, driving with the greatest fury, till they encounter one of the numerous islands, or expend their violence across its whole breadth. It was on one of these, rushing out of this very gap from the upper lake, that a gallant officer, the Hon. A. B. and two boatmen were drowned in the autumn of 1830. The lower lake was comparatively calm, and they were making a tack across the gap with (it is supposed) the sheet belayed, when the squall struck the boat upon her beam, and she sunk within view of his brother, Lord K. But to continue our friend Barney's story of the widow and her son :

" Thomassheen, after he turned the Lac Fecheen wasn't himself for a long time. People say that no one was ever right after they had any thing to do wid it, for I'm sure it belongs to the ' gentry'—the ' good people,' you know. Bud Thomassheen was a fine, hearty, rollickin' blade, that didn't fear much for pishrogues, [21] or thim kind of things, an' as clane a boy as

ever stood in the face of a loy, [22] or handled a blackthorn at the fair of Funchanough, an' that same puts me in mind of the rason he's in the ould castle to-day.

“ Ye see there was an ould bickerin' betune the Walshes and the Mulligans, on account of a girl of the Walshes bein' taken off by Patsheen Gow [23] that lives at the cross-roads, an' she goin' to be married to Shamus Phaddy Shamus Brannaugh, a boy of the Walshes, your honour—an' when they couldn't get Patsheen Gow, they said they'd be revenged upon the Mulligans, for Patsheen was a clevin of theirs—an' well become them, bud at the fair of Funchanough there was a great gatherin' entirely, for the fight was expected, an' the army from Galway—bekase as how the polls was fairly licked clever an' clean out of the pattern of Headford the Sunday fortnight afore. So there was a great faction of the boys, an' Thomassheen Rua was in it too, an' helpin' the Walshes, for he had an ould grudge agin Patsheen for swearin' to the track of his ass's shoe that was found in Felix Mulcahy's oats, an' there they were hoshin' and clearin' the whole street afore them, an' darin' one of the breed of the Mulligans to show his nose—and in the clappin' of your hand there wasn't a tent or a standin' to be seen in the whole fair.

“ The Walshes had it all their own way, for the others got afeard and ran away, or wint a hidin' in the houses. Bud as ill luck 'ud have it, they mit an uncle of Patsheen's first cousin's, an' they set to batin' upon him, an' sarra bit of this world's bread ever he'd ate weren't it for so many of them that was in it, and all strikin' together, you see they were hindrin' one another's blows. Bud at last the sodgers cam up, for the polis was afeard of the stones that was flyin' as thick as hail, an' the magistrate rid the act, as they call the newspaper he took out of his pocket—an' whin the sogers was tould to fire upon them, in a jiffey they all med off across the bogs to the lake, where the army couldn't git. Ough!! Bud it was a mortal beatin' that the same man got. I hard tell, he was so bad that he had to be anointed afore night, an' 'twas the opinion of Judy Mallowney an' every body, that the priest wouldn't overtake him alive, for he was speachless, an' when the doctor came he took the full up of my two fists of his skull out of him that was as small as paas, 'twas a many a day afore he was off the broad of his back, an' troth the same man isn't right in his head since.

“ Bud, sir, to tell you about Thomassheen. There was a woman under a cart while the strikin' was goin' on, an' she came an' swore that it was Thomassheen Rua that was headin' the boys : so with that same, Mr. B. sent a warrant after him, an' he was aforced to be on his *keepin* for a many a day, bekase the peelers used to be watchin' him at every wake and prin-kim that was in the country. Bud Thomassheen an' his mother were livin' in the ould castle there below, unknowen'st to any one bud a couple of the neighbours. Well, at long run the sick man got better, an' they made it up about a quarter ago ; an' though I say it, that's a cousin garmin of his aunt, there is not a better warrant to shoot a phillaseen, [24] or to land a trout upon the borders of Lough Corrib, an' there he is livin' in the castle from that day to this, fishin' and divartin' himself, an' sarra wan of the peelers itself axes to mind him ; though there was a summons sent for him the other day for spearing a salmon, (an' small blame to him, poor boy,) but that Pauck O'Neal, the barger, is the dickins itself.”

“ Well, but, my man, I want to know all about this Hen's Castle.”

Barney's narrative being rather disjointed, and occasionally digressive, we shall here render it into plain English for the benefit of those who may not be conversant with the peculiar phraseology of the lower order of Irish :—

Castle Hen, of which the above is a representation, is generally supposed to have been one of the inland castles of Grana Uaile, or Grace O'Maley, in whose time the fortresses around this secluded spot must have been almost unknown, if not inaccessible. Tradition says it was held by one of the O'Flaherty s, who owed fealty to this chieftainness, and it is even supposed by some that it was here the heir of Howth was carried when stolen by the O'Maley s as a

punishment for the inhospitality of his parents, and only restored upon condition of the gates of Howth castle remaining open during dinner time. Be this as it may, this castle, at the period of our history, was in possession of O'Flaherty—but whether the soubriquet of “ Na Cullugh,” (the cock,) was applied from his great personal courage, or his quartering a “ Gallus Gallinaceous” upon his escutcheon, history is silent : suffice it to say, that he was known as O'Flaherty ria Cullugh, and at constant war with the Joyces, by whom he was surrounded, each party looking upon the other as an intruder.

As long as they feared the assisting arm of the chieftainess of the west, O'Flaherty remained the victor ; but upon the death of that heroine, O'Flaherty being reduced to his own resources, the Joyces began a most fearful retaliation, and much blood was spilt on both sides. At length O'Flaherty and a few of his followers were surprised upon a hunting excursion in the neighbouring mountains, cut off from the castle, and O'Flaherty na Cullugh slain.

The Joyces now imagined the castle theirs ; but though the cock was slain, his wife defended it with the greatest skill and heroism against all their attacks, acquiring for her the title of “ The Hen.” Hence the real origin of Krishlane na Kirca.

History or tradition is silent upon much of the after life of this lady. Some say the Joyces made a road into the castle, and demolished both it and its inmates. There certainly are the remains of a rude causeway leading from the nearest point of land towards the island, which can be easily seen on a clear day. We know that Lough Corrib has risen much, owing to the number of dams, &c. that obstruct its fall toward the sea. Besides, it differs from other lakes, in being more a congress of water from a number of rivers running together and subject to increase from obstructions to drainage and other causes ; it seems more than probable that this causeway was once above the level of its waters. So far my friend.

Before I go farther, I shall narrate one or two incidents connected with the singular superstition of the Lach na Fecheen :

Peggy Griffin was as smart, merry, well-made a colleen as any in the hill country—no girl would foot it so well at a wake-dance, no one could say a smarter thing when accosted by the boys, none so kind to those she liked, none so vexing to those she would put a slight upon. Her sharp black eye, her perty, though prettily turned-up nose, the pouting lips of her own large but expressive mouth, her red hair—all bespoke the ardent temperament that must love or hate in excess. Now amongst many admirers Peggy had but few lovers, for the truth was, the men were afraid of her. But Billy Mongan was less considerate, and more taken with her winning way, for the light of her eye was upon him, and though she was *often* saucy to others, she was ever sweet upon him. Thus the courtship went on, and though all the neighbours thought they were engaged, so it was that Will had never yet put the important question, which seemed every now and then on the point of his tongue : “ Peggy will you marry me,” had never yet been said.—Thus went on the time, until all of a sudden the lover's attentions ran cool. Instead of meeting at every time and turn possible, William was now never in the way ; and it was soon ascertained that he had fixed his inconstant affection, or rather, it is feared, his more prudent speculation, on a girl whose father had lately died, leaving her, his only child, a farm well stocked with cows and sheep. The result was, that Peggy was altogether deserted, and the match soon made and consummated, that made William the husband of an heiress, and a comfortable farmer. The poet says, that “ Hell holds no fury like a woman scorned.” So it was here : Peggy Griffin was just the person to feel and act the fury ; and she *would* avenge herself, and *that* at the risk of all that was valuable in life or fearful in eternity ; and though aware, as she was, that if she resorted to Casey's sword, (as it is sometimes called,) and went through the terrible rite of turning the Lach na Fecheen, no petition of her's for good or evil would ever be attended to, and that God and devil would be deaf to her ever after—yet she did go through with it : she fasted three Wednesdays and three Fridays,

eating nothing but barley bread mixed with sand she performed what is called the “ backward station,” that is, the creed and the paternoster she said care-fully BACKWARDS, in the name of the devil, and then she invoked every curse for time and eternity on her false lover, his wife, and all belonging to him. The results were terrible . Mongan’s wife wasted away, the victim of slow, withering consumption; and his property melted gradually as snow on the side of a ditch in February; and then he died himself of a slow fever.

And what became of Peggy Griffin?

There is a poor, witless vagrant that wanders through these hills—she is almost naked, as to the covering that would shelter her from the elements, but she has a few faded ribbons flaunting through her half-red, half-grey hair she seldom enters a house, but snatches, as it were by force, a few potatoes that are left out for her when she is seen to come near a village ; she is observed often kneeling beside a holy well, but her prayers are mixed with curses, and she howls out an angry expostulation against God and the devil, because they *must not* hear her. She lodges, in summer, wherever she can find any ivy-mantled old ruin—she speaks to the ghosts that she says are all around her, but can do her no good or harm—in the winter she hovels with the cattle in some lone hut—wherever she goes the children fly from her, and the pious cross themselves. Such was Peggy Griffin some years ago, the practiser and victim of this horrible superstition. It is believed (for she has not for some years been seen) that she has gone to “ where the weary are at rest.”

Another circumstance connected with this dark superstition has been communicated to me by the young friend, Doctor Wilde, who supplied me with the narrative concerning Thomasheen, and the Hen’s Castle. There is a man living in Joyce Country, who, from the number of bullocks in his possession, is named Paurick na Mullaun. This man, though pasturing his flocks and herds on many a hill, is perfectly illiterate, and speaks no language but the Irish ; he is of ungovernable passions, and has never yet spared any means pecuniary, physical, or, it may be said brutal, to attain the gratification of his desires. When attempts at seduction or abduction have failed, he has arrived at his end by means the most abhorrent. Living in the fastnesses of this district, his establishment is like that of a Turcoman Aga, and his bawn or farm-yard is surrounded by cabins which he has found necessary to erect for his numerous females, who thus being kept in separate lodges, are, in some measure, but not altogether, kept from cabals, feuds, and fightings. Scarcely a month elapses but the magistrates of the adjoining petty sessions have their time occupied by complaints laid by the respective women of this harem against their lord and against their frail sisterhood. For this strong man—strong in his position, strong in the powerful faction to which he belongs, makes no difficulty in divorcing one wife to marry another, and is in fact as great a polygamist as any moslem. A few years ago this man was accused of some nefarious deed, and on this occasion most characteristically chose not to clear himself by a legal trial, but by resorting to the wild justice of Casey’s sword. He *would* turn the Lach na Fecheen to prove his innocence. Accordingly on an appointed day he resorted to the spot attended by a man whose business it was to act as a sort of priest at this wild rite, and show the adventurer how he was to turn the stone, and what to say upon the occasion. Now so it was that Phaurick na Mullaun’s courage, when it came to the sticking point, altogether failed, for he felt his guilt, and knew that if he invoked the terrible curses of the Lach na Fecheen, something horrible would await him ; so he proposed to his companion to act as proxy for him, and offered him half-a-crown for the job. It would appear that this substitution was not unusual, for the man readily undertook, for the promised payment, to repeat the necessary prayers, invoke the awful imprecations, and turn the stone in the name of Satan. Accordingly the whole was gone through, and no immediate mischief ensued—the proxy’s neck was *not* twisted awry his face was *not* turned round to his back—there he stood demanding the promised hire which Phaurick, base man, refused to pay, and would have put the whole thing off as a joke ; but this did not satisfy the proxy, a scuffle ensued, a fierce wrestle came on, and though Phaurick na Mullaun was stout, yet the wild Joyce was stouter, and besides Phaurick had on a neck-cloth, inside which his

antagonist fastened his left hand, and with his four knuckles squeezed upon his windpipe, got him under, and then he, choking, lay, his back on the Lach na Fecheen. To save his life then, Phaurick promised, with an oath, the repayment of the hire, and, on being let loose, they both adjourned to a neighbouring public-house, and it was agreed that the half-crown should be spent on whiskey : a quart of which, when produced, Joyce took up, applied to his mouth, and attempted to swallow at a draught, and in the act suddenly dropped dead. There is no doubt but that the spasm of the *epiglottis*, or trap-door of the windpipe, was the cause of the fellow's death ; but all the people round attributed it to his being proxy for Phaurick ; in confirmation of which Phaurick made off into the mountains, and a coroner's inquest was summoned. My friend, who as a medical practitioner residing in the vicinity was called in professionally on the extraordinary inquest, says that the scene was most imposing. The body exposed to view at a short distance from the fatal stone—the smiling lake beneath the surrounding mountains, reposing in all the changeful varieties of light and shade—the occasional keening of the wild mountain women—loud voices, at times, of the leaders of the rival clans, as they passed their conflicting judgments on this fatal occasion; all this was calculated to fasten on the memory, and there leave a vivid impression of the Lach na Fecheen.

I was given to understand by Mr. Nimmo and the innkeeper that the people in Joyce Country were in general much more comfortable than in other parts of Connaught—that the population was not so excessive, the farms larger, and the rents not at all high and that there was a great deal of wealth, not only in stock, but in hoarded money amongst these mountaineers. I also was informed that there was much ignorance and contented destitution of all that a better informed people would call comforts, so that a man when he became wealthy did not by any means exhibit it in his living, his house, or furniture. With plenty of stock of all sorts, they never indulged in animal food—even their own butter or pigs they would not touch, but converted all into money, which, when procured, was simply hoarded, hid in some secure place—and the idea of making interest on it was quite out of the question. Such a proceeding was not according to their general distrustfulness, or the determination to do only as their fathers before them did ; in fact, the *only* way to come at the hoard was by the management of the daughters, who contrived it so, that some young fellow should run away with them, and keep them stowed away in some secret place, until the father, fearful of the good name of his family, came down with the hard cash, and that in no small measure, to make his COLLEEN (*Anglicé*, girl) an honest woman. From what I have thus heard I should suppose that the people of this district are amongst the least educated of any in Ireland.

I asked if there was there much illicit distillation. I was informed that there was not much at present, but that heretofore it was very prevalent, and that there was no small ingenuity, as well as perseverance, practised in eluding detection. Mr. Nimmo told me one of the best anecdotes I have heard on this rather trite subject.

A man who was known to have a large mountain farm and extensive homestead in these hills was observed very frequently to ride into the town of B——, and he never made his appearance without a woman, supposed to be his wife, jogging steadily and uprightly on a pillion behind him. HE was tall and gaunt in look—SHE large and rotund, and encumbered, as is the mode of all country wives, with a multitude of petticoats ; they always rode into the yard of a man who kept a public-house, and before they alighted off their horse, the gate was carefully shut. It was known, moreover, that this publican acted as factor for this farmer in the sale of his butter, and so for a length of time things went on in a quiet and easy way, until one day it so happened (as indeed it is very common for idlers in a very idle country town to stand making remarks on the people as they came by) that the gauger, the innkeeper, and a squireen were lounging away their day, when the farmer slowly paced by, with his everlasting wife behind him. “ Well,” says the squireen, “ of all the women I ever saw bumping on a pillion that lump of a woman sits the awkwardest ; she don't sit like a *nathural* born *crathur* at all ; and do you see how modest she is, what with her napped down beaver hat, and all the

frills and fallals about her, not an inch of her sweet face is to be seen no more than an owl from out the ivy. I have a great mind to run up alongside of her and give her a pinch in the toe, to make old buckram look about her for once. "Oh, let her alone," says the innkeeper, "they're a decent couple from Joyce Country. I'll be bound, what makes her sit so stiff is all the eggs she is bringin' in to Mrs. O'Mealey, who factors the butter for them." There was while he said this a cunning leer about the innkeeper's mouth, as much as to denote that there was, to his knowledge, however he came by it, something mysterious about this said couple ; this was not lost on the subtle gauger, and he thought it no harm just to try more about the matter, and so he says in a frolicsome way, "Why then, for cur'osity sake, I will just run up to them and give the mistress a pinch—somewhere—she won't notice *me* at all in the crowd, and maybe then she'll look up, and we'll see her own purty face." Accordingly no sooner said than done—he ran over to where the farmer was getting on slowly through the market crowd ; and on the side of the pillion to which the woman's back was turned, attempted to give a sly pinch, but he might as well have pinched a pitcher ; nor did the woman even lift up her head, or ask who is it that's hurting me. This emboldened him to give another knock with his knuckles, and this assault he found not opposed as it should be by petticoats and *flesh*, but by what he felt to be petticoats and *metal*. This is queer, thought the gauger—he now was more bold, and with the butt-end of his walking-stick he hit what was so hard a bang which sounded as if he had struck a tin pot ; "Stop here, honest man," cried the gauger. "Let my wife alone, will you, before the people," cried the farmer. "Not till I see what this honest woman is made of," roared the gauger. So *he* pulled, and the farmer dug his heels into his colt to get on, but all would not do—in the struggle down came the wife into the street, and as she fell on the pavement the whole street rang with the squash, and in a moment there is a gurgling as from a burst barrel, and a strong smelling water comes flowing all about—and flat poor Norah lies, there being an irruption of all her intestines, which flowed down the gutter as like potteen whiskey as eggs are like eggs.

The fact was, that our friend from the land of Joyce had got made, by some tinker, a tin vessel with head and body the shape of a woman, and dressed it out as a proper country dame—in this way he carried his DARLINT behind him, and made much of her,

As a pendant to this story, I am disposed to narrate another Connaught story about a woman and a pillion, which, if it did not happen in Joyce Country, occurred not far from it, in the county of Galway.

About the commencement of the present century, the Connaught secondary gentry, who seldom thought of going to Dublin, used, besides rigging themselves out at Ballinasloe fair, to have their common and occasional wants in the way of raiment, jewellery, and spicery supplied by pedlars who went about the country with large and strong chests stowed on carts, and which contained often valuable assortments of goods of all kinds. These persons were of such respectability that some of them dined at the tables of the gentry, and giving, as they generally did, credit, they were very acceptable, and were treated with all possible consideration. In fact there was a considerable smuggling trade carried on along the whole western coast, and in return for our Irish wool, the French silks and jewellery, and the Flanders laces, came in without the intervention of a custom-house. In promoting this traffic, many of the western proprietors were concerned, and it is said that families who wear coronets became right wealthy by the export of wool and the import of claret and French fabrics. Be this as it may, the itinerant pedlars I have just alluded to were the convenient factors of this contrabandism, and their good offices were, on all hands, acknowledged. Of these, Mrs. Bridget Bodkin [25] was not the least active, accommodating, or ingenious ; she assumed to spring from one of the tribes of Galway, and though the gentry of the west looked down on regular traders and shopkeepers—yet Biddy Bod, as she was called, was considered as honourable and admissible, for she was very useful; and many a wedding, as well as wedding geer, was the result of her providence. But to my story : a large fleet of East Indiamen, unable to beat up channel from long-continued north-easterly winds, was obliged to put into Galway-bay for water and provisions, and there these huge merchantmen lay at anchor, freighted not only as

at present with tea and indigo, but with those delicate muslins which Manchester had not yet learned to imitate. Now it was known to Bid Bod that each officer and sailor might have a Supply of such valuable goods as a private venture, and to make her own market she went on board ; expert as she was in smuggling, she knew how and where about her own ample person to stow away soft goods : for she, mind you, fair reader, was not strait-laced as you may be—she, by nature large, still did not care to tighten herself up as if she would be a wasp—no, on the contrary, the poor thing became quite dropsical—the swelling of her legs and body was sometimes awful what medicine she used to get down the enlargement, whether belladonna or digitalis, is not recorded—but she *did* now and then keep down her dropsical distensions, and during the low state of her intermittent “ became small by degrees and beautifully less.” But on her return from the India fleet Bid Bod had a *full* fit of dropsy—her body was like a rhinoceros—her legs like those of the largest elephant of the King of Siam—she might have got the elephantiasis from being for a time so near, while on board the fleet, the elephant which the Nabob of Arcot was sending as a present to Queen Charlotte ; and so she landed, in all her *amplitude*, west of Claddah, and there she, as I may say, tapped herself, for she unrolled all the gold and silver muslin, the wonders of the India loom—Cashmere shawls that a lady might cover herself with from head to foot, and yet they would pass easily through her wedding ring—these she stuffed into the hollow of an immense pillion on which she rode.

Well now suppose you see Bid with her padded pillion fastened on her large black buttoned-tailed mare, and she, by help of a convenient granite stone, is mounted, and her man Luke is before her, and she has her arm *confidingly* placed around said Luke’s waist, and they are jogging on slow-paced and sure—they have got clear of the town of Galway, the custom-house, the dreaded custom-house is far behind, and she is entering on the interior, the road to Athenry before her, and all seems safe. How she chuckles in her large and inmost soul over the success of her venture—when all of a sudden, at the turning of the road, out bounced a smart, dapper, active-eyed, but rather diminutive man, and caught hold of the rein of her bridle : “ Madam,” said he, “ you must excuse me for stopping you, while I have every desire to be civil to a lady, yet having received information I can depend on, that you have just landed from the East India fleet with a quantity of run goods about you, you must submit to be searched, which I must now proceed to do in the most accurate manner consistent with my respect for your sex and quality.”

Bid was at this accost, no doubt, surprised and distressed, but in no way thrown off her centre, and without any hesitation, she replied :

“ Sir, many thanks to you for your civility, I am quite aware you are but acting according to information, and doing what you consider your duty ; and, sir, in order to show how much you are mistaken, I shall at once alight, but I am sure, sir, a gentleman like you will help a poor, infirm woman labouring under my sad complaint to alight with ease the mare, bad manners to her, is skittish, and it requires all my servant’s hands to hold her. ‘ Luke avick,’ this gentleman insists on taking me down, hold hard the beast while I am alighting—I’ll do my endeavours to get off— there, sir—so ‘ Button,’ speaking to her horse. Now, hold up your arms, sir, and I will gently drop ; yes, that will do;” and with that down she plopped herself into the little dapper exciseman’s arms.

A summer tent pitched on a Swiss meadow might as well bear up against the down-tumbling avalanche as this spare man could the mountain of flesh that came over him, so down he went sprawling as Bid Bod intended he should do, and she uppermost, moaning and heaving over him, and there they lay, when with stentorian voice Bet cried out to her boy Luke :

“ Luke, honey, ride off, never mind me—the gentleman I’m sure will help me up when he can ! skelp away ‘ ma boughal.’ ”

In the mean while, the exciseman lay groaning, and Bet moaning. I shall not attempt to describe the remainder of this scene ; I leave it to the imagination to suppose that the smuggler kept her position just so long as she thought it gave time enough for her property being carried far and away, from the hands of the overwhelmed gauger.

[1] In Irish, a gap or pass.

[2] The river of the Trout's Mouth, one of the principal sources of Lough Corrib.

[3] Built by A. Nimmo, while making these roads.

[4] A term applied to any large building, whether ancient or modern, with a court or enclosed place within.

[5] Red Thomas.

[6] The Earls of Leitrim and Charlemont own a large tract of country about here, but as they are co-heirs, their tenants know them but as one person under the above title.

[7] One of those abuses by which drivers and under agents make each tenant give them so many days' work.

[8] Toothless Kate.

[9] Another " Big Joyce," as remarkable for his litigious, as John for his pugnacious propensities.

[10] Two of the Joyce Country legislators, to whom are referred all disputes, whether public or domestic. The latter, a notorious character, of whom more by-and-by, of Herculean size, well known as King Joyce.

[11] Relation or follower. Old woman.

[12] The swearing by a skull, a bible, and a bunch of keys, is one of the most approved methods of solemn adjudication among many of these people.

[13] Shrove-tide.

[14] A young infant.

[15] This is a well-known fact in many parts of the west.

[16] A disturbance.

[17] Legs of old stockings.

[18] Oaten cakes.

[19] An osier basket for straining potatoes.

[20] The hotel is so called by the people.

[21] Fairies.

[22] Spade.

[23] Paddy the Smith.

[24] Plover.

[25] I advise the reader that this name is fanciful it is not in the record supplied by a very agreeable lady, now no more.

A tour in Connaught : comprising sketches of Clonmacnoise, Joyce country, and Achill (1839)

Author : Otway, Caesar, 1780-1842

Subject : Connaught (Ireland) — Description and travel

Publisher : Dublin W. Curry

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : MSN

Book contributor : Robarts — University of Toronto

Collection : robarts ; toronto

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/tourinconnaughtc00otwauoft>

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

August 29 2011