

# A TOUR IN IRELAND. 1776-1779.

By  
ARTHUR YOUNG.

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## INTRODUCTION. (*Excerpt*)

Arthur Young was born in 1741, the son of a clergyman, at Bradfield, in Suffolk. He was apprenticed to a merchant at Lynn, but his activity of mind caused him to be busy over many questions of the day. He wrote when he was seventeen a pamphlet on American politics, for which a publisher paid him with ten pounds' worth of books. He started a periodical, which ran to six numbers. He wrote novels. When he was twenty-eight years old his father died, and, being free to take his own course in life, he would have entered the army if his mother had not opposed. He settled down, therefore, to farming, and applied to farming all his zealous energy for reform, and all the labours of his busy pen. In 1768, a year before his father's death, he had published "A Six Weeks' Tour through the Southern Counties of England and Wales," which found many readers.

In 1780 Arthur Young published this "Tour in Ireland, with General Observations on the Present State of that Kingdom in 1776-78." The general observations, which give to all his books a wide general interest, are, in this volume, of especial value to us now. It is here reprinted as given by Pinkerton.

Arthur Young's sight became dim in 1808, and blindness gradually followed. He died in 1820 at his native village of Bradfield, in Suffolk, at the age of seventy-nine years.

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The Shannon adds not a little to the convenience and agreeableness of a residence so near it. Besides affording these sorts of wild-fowl, the quantity and size of its fish are amazing: pikes swarm in it, and rise in weight to fifty pounds. In the little flat spaces on its banks are small but deep lochs, which are covered in winter and in floods. When the river withdraws, it leaves plenty of fish in them, which are caught to put into stews. Mr. Holmes has a small one before his door at Johnstown, with a little stream which feeds it. A trowling-rod here gets you a bite in a moment, of a pike from twenty to forty pounds. I ate of one of twenty-seven pounds so taken. I had also the pleasure of seeing a fisherman bring three trout, weighing fourteen pounds, and sell them for sixpence-halfpenny a piece. A couple of boats lying at anchor, with lines p. 145extended from one to the other, and hooks in plenty from them, have been known to catch an incredible quantity of trout. Colonel Prittie, in one morning, caught four stone odd pounds, thirty-two trout. In general they rise from three to nine pounds. Perch swarm; they appeared in the Shannon for the first time about ten years ago, in such plenty that the poor lived on them. Bream of six pounds; eels very plentiful. There are many gillaroos in the river; one of twelve pounds weight was

sent to Mr. Jenkinson. Upon the whole, these circumstances, with the pleasure of shooting and boating on the river, added to the glorious view it yields, and which is enough at any time to cheer the mind, render this neighbourhood one of the most enviable situations to live in that I have seen in Ireland. The face of the country gives every circumstance of beauty. From Killodeernan Hill, behind the new house building by Mr. Holmes, the whole is seen to great advantage. The spreading part of the Shannon, called Loch Derg, is commanded distinctly for many miles. It is in two grand divisions of great variety: that to the north is a reach of five miles leading to Portumna. The whole hither shore a scenery of hills, checkered by enclosures and little woods, and retiring from the eye into a rich distant prospect. The woods of Doras, belonging to Lord Clanricarde, form a part of the opposite shore, and the river itself presents an island of one hundred and twenty acres. Inclining to the left, a vale of rough ground, with an old castle in it, is backed by a bold hill, which intercepts the river there, and then the great reach of fifteen miles, the bay of Sheriff, spreads to the eye, with a magnificence not a little added to by the boundary, a sharp outline of the county of Clare mountains, between which and the Duharrow hills the Shannon finds its way. These hills lead the eye still more to the left, till the Keeper meets it, presenting a very beautiful outline that sinks into other ranges of hill, uniting with the Devil's Bit. The home scenery of the grounds, woods, hills, and lake of Johnstown, is beautiful.

Dancing is very general among the poor people, almost universal in every cabin. Dancing-masters of their own rank travel through the country from cabin to cabin, with a piper or blind fiddler, and the pay is sixpence a quarter. It is an absolute system of education. Weddings are always celebrated with much dancing, and a Sunday rarely passes without a dance. There are very few among them who will not, after a hard day's work, gladly walk seven miles to have a dance. John is not so lively, but then a hard day's work with him is certainly a different affair from what it is with Paddy. Other branches of education are likewise much attended to, every child of the poorest family learning to read, write, and cast accounts.

There is a very ancient custom here, for a number of country neighbours among the poor people to fix upon some young woman that ought, as they think, to be married. They also agree upon a young fellow as a proper husband for her. This determined, they send to the fair one's cabin to inform her that on the Sunday following "she is to be horsed," that is, carried on men's backs. She must then provide whisky and cider for a treat, as all will pay her a visit after mass for a hurling match. As soon as she is horsed, the hurling begins, in which the young fellow appointed for her husband has the eyes of all the company fixed on him. If he comes off conqueror, he is certainly married to the girl; but if another is victorious, he as certainly loses her, for she is the prize of the victor. These trials are not always finished in one Sunday; they take sometimes two or three, and the common expression when they are over is, that "such a girl was goaled." Sometimes one barony hurls against another, but a marriageable girl is always the prize. Hurling is a sort of cricket, but instead of throwing the ball in order to knock down a wicket, the aim is to pass it through a bent stick, the end stuck in the ground. In these matches they perform such feats of activity as ought to evidence the food they live on to be far from deficient in nourishment.

In the hills above Derry are some very fine slate quarries, that employ sixty men. The quarrymen are paid 3s. a thousand for the slates, and the labourers 5d. a

day. They are very fine, and sent by the Shannon to p. 148distant parts of the kingdom; the price at the quarry 6s. a thousand, and at the shore 6s. 8d. Four hundred thousand slates are raised to pay the rent only, from which some estimate may be made of the quantity.

Mr. Head has a practice in his fences which deserves universal imitation; it is planting trees for gate-posts. Stone piers are expensive, and always tumbling down; trees are beautiful, and never want repairing. Within fifteen years this gentleman has improved Derry so much, that those who had only seen it before would find it almost a new creation. He has built a handsome stone house, on the slope of a hill rising from the Shannon, and backed by some fine woods, which unite with many old hedges well planted to form a woodland scene beautiful in the contrast to the bright expanse of the noble river below. The declivity on which these woods are finishes in a mountain, which rises above the whole. The Shannon gives a bend around the adjoining lands, so as to be seen from the house both to the west and north, the lawn falling gradually to a margin of wood on the shore, which varies the outline. The river is two miles broad, and on the opposite shore cultivated inclosures rise in some places almost to the mountain top, which is very bold.

It is a very singular demesne; a stripe of very beautiful ground, reaching two miles along the banks of the river, which forms his fence on one side, with a wall on the other. There is so much wood as to render p. 149it very pleasing; adding to every day by planting all the fences made or repaired. From several little hills, which rise in different parts of it, extensive views of the river are commanded quite to Portumna; but these are much eclipsed by that from the top of the hill above the slate quarry. From thence you see the river for at least forty miles, from Portumna to twenty miles beyond Limerick. It has the appearance of a fine basin, two miles over, into which three great rivers lead, being the north and south course and the Bay of Sheriff. The reaches of it one beyond another to Portumna are fine. At the foot of the mountain Mr. Head's demesne extends in a shore of rich woodland.

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