MUNSTER

Pictured by Alexander Williams

Described by Stephen Gwynn

MUNSTER

Pictured by Alexander Williams

Described by Stephen Gwynn

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Munster

Title: Munster

Author: Stephen Lucius Gwynn

Illustrator: Alexander Williams

Release date: October 26, 2013 [eBook #44046]

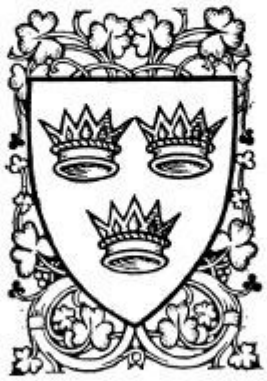
Language: English

Credits: Produced by sp1nd, Diane Monico, and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net (This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive)

THE OLD CLOCK TOWER, YOUGHAL

MUNSTER

Described by Stephen Gwynn
Pictured by Alexander Williams



BLACKIE AND SON LIMITED
LONDON GLASGOW AND BOMBAY
1912

MUNSTER

Described by Stephen Gwynn
Pictured by Alexander Williams

BLACKIE AND SON LIMITED
LONDON GLASGOW AND BOMBAY
1912

Beautiful Ireland

LEINSTER
ULSTER
MUNSTER
CONNAUGHT

Uniform with this Series

Beautiful England

OXFORD
THE ENGLISH LAKES
CANTERBURY
SHAKESPEARE-LAND
THE THAMES
WINDSOR CASTLE
CAMBRIDGE
NORWICH AND THE BROADS
THE HEART OF WESSEX
THE PEAK DISTRICT
THE CORNISH RIVIERA
DICKENS-LAND
WINCHESTER
THE ISLE OF WIGHT
CHESTER AND THE DEE

YORK

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

MUNSTER

I

The best way to get to Munster nowadays is undoubtedly by the new route from Fishguard to Rosslare, in which the Great Western Railway has reopened what was for ancient times the natural and easy way from England to Ireland. The Normans, as everyone knows, came across here, an advance party landing on the coast of Wexford; but the main force under Strongbow sailed straight up the river to Waterford. Many another invader before the Normans took the same route: and there is little doubt but that the peaceful invasion of Christianity had begun in this region, or that south-eastern Ireland was already baptized, before Patrick set out on his mission. Earlier again, the Milesians (according to modern theory) came from Britain, a race of warriors trained to fight on foot in the Roman fashion with sword and javelin, and drove before them the chariot-fighting people who then held the wide plain watered by the three great rivers which meet in Waterford harbour.

For a good sailor, undoubtedly the long passage to Cork, ending with a sail up the beautiful haven and the "pleasant waters of the river Lee", is to be preferred beyond all other routes. But the mass of mankind, and more specially of womankind, like the short sea and quick rail, and their choice is Fishguard to Rosslare. You enter the southern province of Ireland by a viaduct which leads from the flat lands of Wexford, through which you will have travelled for nearly an hour, on to the steep left bank of the river Suir facing Waterford city. The great bridge crosses the united Barrow and Nore; half a mile lower down is the junction with the Suir, and from the train you have a glorious view of the wide pool made at the confluence—a noble entrance into this province of lovely waters.

The run along the river is beautiful, too. Citizens of Waterford have built them prosperous villas and mansions facing you along the south bank, and a mile below the city on an island there is seen a castle of the Fitz-Geralds—rebuilt recently, but comprising in it the walls of an ancient place of strength which has never ceased to be a dwelling of this strong Norman-Irish clan. It was the household, too, from which issued a notable man in latter times,

Edward Fitz-Gerald, the translator of *Omar Khayyam*. His portrait, by Laurence, hangs there, picturing him as a chubby, good-humoured boy.

The city itself may show to you only a line of lights, very picturesque along its great length of quay: but by daylight you can distinguish the low round castle which still keeps the name of Strongbow's tower. Fragments of the old walls remain, and there are buildings of much antiquarian interest—the restored cathedral, the ruined Franciscan abbey. But, on the whole, you are not likely to stop in Waterford, with Kerry and West Cork before you.

Yet let me tell a little of the things which the ordinary tourist visiting Munster passes by in his haste. The route from Rosslare to Killarney strikes across from the valley of the Suir into the valley of the Blackwater, rounding the Comeragh mountains: and I do not suppose it can be disputed that the Blackwater is the most beautiful of Irish rivers. I have seen it at Mallow, at Fermoy, at Lismore, and at Cappoquin, and everywhere it is the same yet different; a chain of long wide pools, but always with a swift flow to keep the water living and sparkling, and they are strung together with great sweeping rapids, deep enough for salmon to lie in, the anglers' joy: while on each shore are hill slopes receding, richly wooded, from the stream and the meadows beside the stream. The palm of beauty belongs of right to Lismore, where the Duke of Devonshire has his great castle overhanging a famous pool: and below it from the bridge one looks down the stream and the valley to a far-off blue vista between the hills. Yonder, where the river meets the sea at Youghal is one of the quaintest and most charming towns of Ireland. I saw it first by the light of a long procession of tall torches which lit up delightfully the old houses with their scrolled fronts of timber, and the pretty faces of girls and women looking out of the first-floor windows: but it was no little surprise to me in that march to find myself under an archway, over which rose a tall slated tower, fully equipped with loopholes, and from whose top (if I had only known it) arrangements had been made to bombard me and my friends that night. In daylight I saw, though with a hasty glance, the very beautiful fifteenth-century church still intact (for a miracle) and still used for worship: the still greater attraction of Sir Walter Raleigh's old house I never visited, but I hope you may. It has a mulberry tree said to be of his planting, and a chimney piece against which he almost certainly reclined his shoulders while in act to toast his travelled calves.

THE BLACKWATER, AT DROMANA

Travelling by this line of rail you will have on your right the Comeragh and the Knockmealdown mountains which divide the valley of the Blackwater from the valley of the Suir. But it may possibly be your pleasure, as it will certainly be your profit, to explore also the Suir valley, which divides the Comeraghs from the outlying mass of Slievenamon, and, farther west, curves northward from the base of the tall Galtee ranges.

I came last into Munster by motor car, driving from Kilkenny to Clonmel over the southern shoulder of Slievenamon (Sliabh na m-Ban, the Witches' Mountains), and a finer journey could not be taken. We struck out through rich pasture and tillage, keeping this shadowy dome which rose from the plain as our objective, till the pass began to define itself. But it was when we had crossed or were crossing the pass that the real beauty began. Slievenamon was on our right, well wooded; facing us, as we ran south, were the Comeraghs, and a low foot ridge thrown out from them, between which and us ran the Suir. The valley is wider than that of the Blackwater, with less of what may be called fancy wooding; but it can fairly hold its own; and the

quay at Clonmel by the shining, swirling river is as pretty as heart could desire.

From Clonmel to Lismore a road carries you over the top of Knockmealdown (that is, Maeldune's Hill), and those of my companions who took that drive crowed over me for the rest of the journey; describing in glowing phrases all the glories I had missed, the wonderful panorama from the top, then the gradual descent down a long wild wooded glen into the tranquil and cultivated beauty of Lismore.

Yet if I had a motor car at Clonmel and only one day's excursion to make, it is not south I would go. I would go north into the heart of Tipperary, through the Golden Vale which lies overshadowed and half-circled by the Galtee range, until I came to the thing best worth seeing in all Ireland, Cashel of the Kings.

Nothing is, I repeat, better worth seeing, nothing less often seen by the tourist; for it lies off the track. The Rock of Cashel is a lone steep hillock, sharply scarped, and rising out of the plain which stretches from Slievenamon to Slieve Phelim, and comprises in fact the rich land drained by the Suir. Such a spot was inevitably seized on for a stronghold, and from its earliest days Milesian rule centred here. To Cashel it was that St. Patrick came to convert the king of Munster, for Cashel was to the southern half of Ireland what Tara was to the northern. It was the heart of Munster, whence principalities radiated out. Thomond, North Munster, ran west from it into Clare, across the Shannon; *Ormond*, *Oir Mumhan*, East Munster, lay away from it towards Kilkenny and Eastern Tipperary; Desmond, *Deas Mumhan*, the great kingdom of South Munster, comprising Cork and Kerry, came to its walls, for theoretically the High Kingship of southern Ireland alternated between Thomond and Desmond. And away south-east, through the gap between Slievenamon and the Comeragh Mountains, you can see into Waterford, which in Irish was called the Deisi, falling into Desmond as a separate lordship.

This rock is crowned with buildings that speak of war and peace, but of peace rather than war. There stands intact Cormac's Chapel, finest example of Irish building in the pre-Norman style; round-arched, solid, barrel-roofed, decorated with string-courses of dogtooth moulding. Beside it is the great cathedral built by the O'Brien lord of Thomond, cathedral and fortress in one;

unroofed now, dismantled, and ruinous, yet hardly beyond reach of repair, since the choir was used as a cathedral till the latter part of the eighteenth century. Then an archbishop got an Act of Parliament authorizing him to unroof it and providing a regiment of soldiers to execute the work. Archbishop Price's reason for such an enterprise may not seem wholly conclusive; he liked—good easy man—to drive in comfortable state to his cathedral door, and no coach and horses could conveniently ascend the winding path up the Rock.

Beside the cathedral is the tall Round Tower, and on the north side of the Rock, many remains of choir schools and other monastic buildings. On the level plain and in the town are other monasteries ruined yet not wholly shorn of their splendour; and within a few miles, Holycross Abbey and Athassel speak of the wealth and culture which were destroyed in this rich land of the Golden Vale.

But the Rock itself, standing up there, crowned with such a group of buildings as no other of Ireland's high places can parallel, is the true object of pilgrimage; and the view from it over the Golden Vale, to the noble Galtee peaks and pinnacles due south of you, and the long waving line of Comeragh Mountains which runs continuously east from them along the valley of the Suir, is a prospect worth long journeying. Nor is that all. Slievenamon rises dome-shaped from the eastern plain, a gap between it and the outlying spurs of Comeragh showing where the Suir, headed off its southward course by Galteemore, finds a way eastward to the sea: and to the north beyond the plain is the far-off range of Slievebloom, dividing Leinster from the Shannon; and nearer towards Athlone and the Shannon are the low hills with the Devil's Bit nipped out of the top of them.

II

If I had to see Munster by motor car, my disposition would be to start from Waterford, follow the valley of the Suir up to Clonmel, then strike north to Cashel and see it. All the monuments can be seen in a few hours, and no ruin or building that I ever visited has so intelligent a custodian. From Cashel I would go to Holycross, that exquisite remnant of monastic splendour, rich in historic memories, and thence push out across Tipperary to the north-west, steering for the gap between Keeper Mountain and the Silver Mines. This would bring me out of the Golden Vale, which is in truth the valley of the Suir, and into the basin of a still greater and more famous river, at its most famous point. For from this gap the route would descend to the Shannon, at the narrow gorge below Lough Derg where all its vast volume of water is contracted to the ford and pass at Killaloe. Here, if you will, is beauty: long peaceful levels above the weir where lake passes imperceptibly into broad river; below it huge swirling rapids, interspersed with wide, smooth, yet swift running salmon pools, all down the twelve miles of river to the head of the tideway at Limerick. And here, too, are historic memories more glorious than can be matched elsewhere in Ireland. It was here at the outflow of the lake, where is an unsuspected ford, that Sarsfield crossed (led by the rapparee, Galloping Hogan), on the raid when he stole out of Limerick along the Clare shore and so to this ford, on his way to lie in wait on the slopes of Keeper for William's expected battering train. On your road from Cashel you will have passed near Ballyneety, where he and his troopers surprised the sleeping convoy and blew the heavy guns into scattered shreds—a splendid foray, splendidly preluding Limerick's heroic and successful resistance to the great Dutchman.

But here at Killaloe, and specially at this ford above it, where great earthworks mark the ancient fort of *Beul Boroimhe*, are memories more honoured than hang about even Sarsfield's name. Here it was that in the tenth century Brian Boru, Brian of the Tribute, built up with his Dalcassians of Clare the power that learnt how to resist the Danes, whose plundering forays threatened to blot out civilization altogether from northern Europe. The first defeat of moment inflicted on them was at Sollohed in the Golden Vale, near

Limerick Junction, where the forces of Thomond were led by Brian's brother, King Mahon. But it was Brian who as a mere youth refused to join Mahon in submission (by any pact, however veiled) to the invaders: it was Brian who had fought them in desperate guerrilla warfare through the hills of Clare, and along the banks of the Shannon, till he was brought down to fifteen men, and Mahon asked him in the council chamber, "Where hast thou left thy followers?" And Brian answered, as the Irish poem tells:

> "I have left them with the foreigners
> After being cut down, O Mahon!
> In hardship they followed me on every field,
> Not like as thy people."

It was Brian who in that council caused appeal to be made to the Clan Dalcais whether they would have peace or war, and "War", they answered, "and this was the voice of hundreds as the voice of one man".

The work that was begun at Kincora was finished sixty years later outside Dublin when the Danish menace was finally broken and dispelled on the shore by Clontarf: and in that fight the old lord of Kincora, Brian of the Tribute, High King by then of all Ireland, fell gloriously in the hour of a victory almost too dearly won.

You can see in Killaloe the little old church, built somewhere in the eighth or ninth century, with its high-pitched roof of stone slabs, under which Brian worshipped more than ten centuries ago. Beside it is the cathedral built by his descendants, and adorned with noble archways in the rich Romanesque style of native Irish architecture.

It is probable—certain, indeed, to my thinking—that Brian's rath and strong place of abode was where the market-place of Killaloe still is, on the top of the high ground to which the streets climb from the river and the churches. The fort at the ford is called in Irish *Beul Boroimhe*, that is the "Mouth of the Tribute": and one can easily see how it came by its name, for here was the strategic position which commanded all the traffic from the long navigable reaches of the upper Shannon and its lakes to the tideway at Limerick. Here portage must be made, here toll could be taken; and not only on the river

traffic but on all the cattle that came down from Clare into Tipperary by this the one really practicable ford.

BLARNEY CASTLE

From Killaloe to Limerick the road is pleasant, along the ever-widening valley which is blocked by Keeper to the north, but trends opening and widening towards West Clare and the sea. Yet to understand the beauty and the charm of that characteristic piece of Irish landscape, you should be taken down the stream in the characteristic boat of those waters, the long pole-driven cot. Shooting the rapids in these craft is a wonderful sensation, and even on a chill day in February the tumult of lashing water sends warmth into the blood. So you can follow the stream till at last below Athlunkard bridge you reach the long Lax Weir, which keeps the memory of Scandinavian settlers in its name (*lax* is Norse for salmon, to-day as then), and the memory of early Norman settlement in the odd little tower built in the middle of the weir to command the passage, as long ago as the days of King John.

In Limerick itself King John's Castle with its great rounded towers frowns over the Bridge of the Broken Treaty, where Sarsfield and his men

covenanted with William for protection to the property and the religious freedom of Irish Catholics, and then took ship for France—first of the Wild Geese, founders of the Irish Brigade—leaving no guardians but honour and justice to enforce the sanction of the treaty, guardians that were of no avail. Much has been written of the siege of Derry and in praise of its heroic defenders: but too little is known of Limerick's resistance, when the French officer, whom James II had left in charge, declared that the walls could be battered down with roasted apples, and Sarsfield answered that defended they should and must be. You can see the mark of William's cannon balls on the old wall near the convent hospital east of the town: single marks on the dark limestone here and there, but at the angle of the wall, where the Black Battery stood, and where a breach was made, there is clear trace still of the desperate assault—from which William's best troops, after they had effected a lodgment, were finally driven back pell-mell.

From Limerick the West Clare Railway (whose vagaries have been made more famous than I ever knew them to deserve) will carry you through Ennis, passing near Bunratty Castle, Quin Abbey, and many another place of fame, to the coast where Lahinch offers one of the most popular golf links in Ireland. It is a wild wind-swept coast, a wild surf beats on the strand that divides Lahinch from Liscannor, and north of it are the great cliffs of Moher. Lisdoonvarna is near by, a spa much frequented by Irishmen, more specially by the Irish clergy. But the favourite place of all who visit this part of Munster is Kilkee, a little watering-place set above steep cliffs on which the Atlantic swings in with all its weight. There is no other place known to me in western Ireland where you can find decent seaside quarters in a spot that meets the full force and splendour of the sea. And from the Clare coast near by—even out of the window of a railway carriage—I saw one of the greatest prospects that eye could look on. To the south, some thirty or forty miles distant, the Dingle peninsula stretched outward, with the huge mass of Brandon rising out of the blue: but away north-west I could see very clear the three island heights of Aran, and east of them the whole group of Connemara mountains, beyond which again, away up into Mayo, the shapes of Mweelrea and Croagh Patrick were dim yet recognizable in outline.

The day was of astonishing clearness, yet, as so often happens in western Ireland, its clearness had nothing hard: the Atlantic blue was deep and sombre, the mountain shapes, exquisite in line, were vested in colour that had

a magic and a mystery all their own. Sunlight across that brine-laden air, across those pungent expanses of bog, is never crudely definite in its revelation; there is a hint of romance and glamour in the pearly shimmer of its brightness.

Clare has noble traditions: and no one should visit it without a pilgrimage to the castle of Carrigaholt on the Shannon estuary near Kilrush; for this was the ancestral home of that branch of the O'Briens who made the ancient name illustrious on every stricken field in Europe. They got their title, the Viscounts Clare, from Charles II, but after the Williamite wars they were attainted; and from Sarsfield's death onward it was always a Lord Clare who commanded the Irish Brigade—that wonderful fighting force whose chief recruiting ground was here in south-western Ireland. Two Lords Clare got their death at the head of their men, one at Massaglia in 1693 when Prince Eugene was beaten: the second at Ramillies, where in the general disaster the Irish Brigade not only saved its own colours, but carried two British standards back to Bruges. The third and last earl, who had refused restitution to all the estates and titles if only he would forswear his religion, led the immortal charge at Fontenoy, when Ireland's banished men snatched in a desperate feat of arms fierce requital for the penal laws that had left them a choice between exile and slavery. Among all the writers who ever handled that period of history, whatever their prepossessions, none ever wrote the name of "Clare's brigade", save with honour and admiration; and no nationalist poet has told their praise so eloquently as the Unionist, Miss Emily Lawless, in two sister poems. One of the two depicts the eve of Fontenoy in the exiles' camp, and the wild stirring in men's hearts. "The wind is wild to-night, and it seems to blow from Clare"—blows with a memory in it and a vision of all that has been left, blows with a promise of things long hoped for, since "Clare's brigade may claim its own" wherever the fight rages.

> "Send us, ye western breezes, our full, our rightful share,
> For faith and home and country and the ruined hearths of Clare."

FERRYBANK, WATERFORD

And the second tells how, on the morrow of the battle, strange craft with strange bodiless sailors were seen on the Western coast, making swift way like homing birds to Corcabascinn, this westernmost barony of Clare.

> "Men of Corcabascinn, men of Clare's brigade,
> Hearken, stony hills of Clare, hear the charge we made,
> See us come together, singing from the fight,
> Back to Corcabascinn in the morning light."

Yet in truth it may be that only the native born will find any special charm in this stormy Corcabascinn or its wild winds and waters; for of prettiness and favour it has none, owning grandeur rather than beauty. The counties of Munster which appeal to every human being who has eyes in his head to see with are Cork and Kerry—but Kerry above all.

III

The unhappy inconveniences of sea travel prevent most folk from visiting County Cork under the best conditions. Access should be by boat: and surely the entrance into that wonderful Cove where the great liners halt to take off mails is noblest of all gateways into Ireland. All the encircling ring of hills is rich with vegetation, but above all on the east by Queenstown is the choicest and most varied wooding. Anything will grow there and nearly everything has been made to grow. The little town itself is picturesque, climbing the steep slope and dominated by Pugin's great cathedral, which stands on the disembarkation quay, making a centre for the last impressions and emotions of those—alas! how many thousands yearly—who leave Ireland.

It is not now as I saw it in the early 'eighties, when hopeless, broken, half-famished peasants were pouring out in a ghastly torrent, mere wreckage on the flood: emigration was then eighty thousand a year, to-day it is less than half that number. Those who go to-day, go reasonably equipped, go for the most part to friends in cities, of which they have heard so much, where they have so many kindred and acquaintances, that the journey seems hardly into exile—hardly to a strange land. Yet, even to-day, every train that brings the emigrants leaves behind it, through the West and South and Midlands, its wake of bitter weeping; at station after station it has gone out amid tearing away of locked hands, last embraces severed, faces of old men twitching, faces of women convulsed with sobs, and sped on its journey to the accompaniment of that dreadful heartrending "keene", the Irish wail, which is heard nowadays more often at the ship's side, or on the railway platform, than at the grave. "Och, the poor soft Irish," I heard a woman say this year, leaving some platform in Cork; on her way, evidently, to a home in the States, where she had lived, no doubt for many years, with the hard-faced, swaggering Yankee, who accompanied her, and who looked with ill-concealed contempt on the tears and emotions of the "poor soft Irish"; but she at least still kept the homely tongue and kind heart.

From Queenstown up to Cork is one of the loveliest waterways in the world, little towns on either bank under the steep wooded shores, and here and there

some old castle. Cork itself may have no very great architectural beauties, but the whole lie of the city, spread between its hills, divided by the various streams of that delightful river, makes a beauty of its own: you see it best from the high ground over against the famous steeple where hang "the bells of Shandon that sound so grand on the pleasant waters of the river Lee".

"Pleasant" is the word for Cork, the county, and its soft-voiced, quick-speaking people, with the odd little turn upwards at the end of their sentence. It was called "the Athens of Ireland", though I would say rather, the Naples: in any case, Cork has always sent out far more than its share of brains. In the days of "Father Prout", who wrote the "Bells of Shandon" and other immortal ditties, Cork had a regular coterie of wits—among the best known being a Dowden, father or grandfather of the illustrious man of letters who is to-day one of the chief lights in Trinity College. The late Provost, Dr. Salmon, a still greater luminary, came also from the southern county—as did half a dozen more of the Fellows whose names are familiar enough to all in Ireland; though some, perhaps, enriched legend and chronicle rather than history, and survive as remembered oddities—after all, not the least loveable of survivals.

The south coast of Cork, from Youghal to the Kenmare River, is the pick of Ireland for yachtsmen. Endless is the succession, from Cork itself with all its lesser creeks and havens, Carrigalo, Carrigaline, and Ringabella, on past Kinsale harbour, Courtmacsherry and Clonakilty bays, Roscarbery, Glandore, and west to Baltimore and Roaring Water, off which lies Cape Clear. Then past Mizen Head, on the west shore, are greater bays, harbours not for yachts, but for navies—Dunmanus, Bantry, and the Kenmare River, whose northern shore belongs to Kerry, but which has a frontier certainly in paradise.

I write of what I have seen, in the Kenmare River: all these southern harbourages are to me only names on the map, save for the quaint little bay of Roscarbery and the long winding creek of Baltimore—both of which I know only as winter shows them, and shows them from the land. Yet of the people of Roscarbery I form at least some picture from the sketches drawn by the two ladies who relate the varied *Experiences of an Irish R.M.*—though West Cork needs to be supplemented by knowledge of Connemara, to realize the scenes that they have in mind. And from Baltimore, or rather from a mile

outside it, I carry away a picture of a congregation dividing after mass into two rival political assemblies, and the one that I addressed consisted largely of women wearing the great black cloak, with black hood giving an odd framework to the wearer's face, which is one of the few and cherished relics of traditional costume. I was told on good authority (when I lamented myself) that if I had the women I had the votes, for West Cork was in all matters under female governance. But of that I cannot testify.

Baltimore is one of the great fishing stations of Ireland, and to it the population of Cape Clear comes for most necessaries of life. Along that coast many craft are familiar, but an odd name hangs about one set: the fishermen from near Dungarvan are always known as "the Turks". In 1631 Algerine pirates made a descent on the town of Baltimore, sacked it and carried a hundred of its folk into slavery: and it was a fisherman from Dungarvan who (under threat of death) piloted the corsairs.

All this shore had fine natural advantages for smuggling which in old days were not neglected: and still, I am told, certain places could be named where cigars and wines of excellent quality can be had at surprisingly moderate price.

Kinsale is a greater haven, fit in old days to be the rival of Cork; and the town there speaks of prosperous merchant folk, with its quaint weather-slated houses, each having the little bow-window which eighteenth-century mariners would seem to have specially affected, and its very old-world bowling green.

SHANDON STEEPLE, FROM THE RIVER LEE

Here was the theatre on which Ireland saw a great game played out—the last and losing throw in the war of O'Neill and O'Donnell against the forces of Elizabeth. At the long last, the promised help from the Continent had come; a Spanish fleet under Don Juan d'Aquila entered the harbour, seized and held the town, which was beleaguered by the English (and Irish allies) under Mountjoy and Carew. O'Neill and O'Donnell, marching down from the north, drew an outer line about the besiegers, and on December 21st battle was joined. Tyrone would have waited, wisely, till the siege could be raised by

cutting the English communications, and the force attacked on the march. But Red Hugh was always bad at waiting, and forced the attack. The combination failed, the Spaniards gave no help, and Mountjoy drove back the Ulstermen. D'Aquila surrendered on good terms, and O'Donnell in hot fury went to Spain to complain of his incompetence and to press for a new expedition. But Elizabeth had her agents in Spain also, and one of them did her such service as was freely rendered in those days. O'Donnell drank a poisoned cup at Simancas, and died of it, and the State Papers contain the poisoner's account of his own exploit and demand for fitting payment. It was only after this that Carew was able to write of *Pacata Hibernia*, an Ireland, where, in truth, he and his had made a wilderness and called it peace. They themselves tell how from the Rock of Cashel to Dingle Bay the voice of man or the lowing of cattle could not be heard.

Loveliest of all regions in Ireland, this country of Desmond has suffered worst of all. Elizabeth's soldiers attempted here, and nearly carried out, a complete extermination of the native race by the sword and by starvation. And when after centuries the folk had multiplied again and were, by universal testimony, gay even in their rags, the famine of 1847 fell upon them, and in the blackest horrors of that time Skibbereen and West Cork attained an awful notoriety. Nowhere else did such heaps of famished and plague-stricken dead defy all efforts even to bury them.

The shadow of those days has not yet entirely passed: but the stranger will see little of it, following the famous route which leads up the Lee valley to Macroom (where the rail ends), and so past Inchigeela and Ballingarry, past Gouganebarra by Keimaneigh, through the mountains to Bantry and Glengariff. And here confession must be made. I have never seen these famous beauties. I have followed the Lee only to Inchigeela where it breaks into a score of channels between little islands covered with scrub oak and birch and hazel, a piece of river scenery whose like I never saw. And I have driven along the road from Macroom to Killarney, along the Sullane River to Ballyvourney, which tens of thousands know as "the metropolis of Irish-speaking Ireland". For, as it chances, Cork alone, of the more prosperous counties, has kept the Irish speech, and kept it in a form the least modified by modern simplifications. Irish is still to-day the language of well-to-do and well-educated men and women. My host at Ballyvourney had received his education in Paris, more than that, had been through all the Franco-Prussian

war, and had seen more of the world than is given to most men; but for many years he has been back, a kind of king among his own people, and a real repository of the ancient scholarship and traditions of the Gael. At Ballingeary, a few miles from him, was founded the first of those "summer schools" where men and women, boys and girls, of all sorts and conditions, and from many corners of the world, unite for common study of the noble language which careless generations had nearly suffered to die out. That settlement is now one of the objects of interest on the coach road, and travellers, if not tourists, may well find it the most interesting of all.

Bantry is one of the great naval stations, one of the great recruiting grounds for the navy. I saw it, as it should be seen, from the sea. It, too, is associated with the memory of one of those failures which stud the course of Irish history like sinister beacons: for here Hoche with a fleet aimed to land in 1796, and here half of his fleet actually arrived, with no one to oppose them. Hoche was then at the pinnacle of his power and fame, an idealist of the early Republican movement, consumed with that real passion for spreading freedom which Napoleon was destined to replace by a very different conception. But Hoche and half of the ships were tempest-driven far out of their course, and it was Grouchy, the slow mover, the man of hesitations, who reached the goal, and, having reached it, failed to act. History hinges on odd chances. Humbert's achievements, two years later, with a mere handful of men, when England had an army in Ireland, put it beyond dispute that Grouchy, even with what he had, could have set on foot a movement that would have driven English power out of Ireland at least for a time: and Wellington himself has told how great a part in breaking down the power of France, from those conflicts in the Peninsula on to the climax of Waterloo, was borne by the unemancipated Catholic Irish peasants, who formed the very bone and sinew of the British line.

It may well be that all was for the best in the best possible of worlds: that it was best that Ireland, instead of freeing herself with the help of Republican France, should help greatly to deliver Europe from the menace of Imperial France—and hand it over to the tender mercies of the Holy Alliance. Yet it needs the faith of Voltaire's philosopher to believe that anything could have been worse for Ireland than the historic evolution which she was actually fated to undergo.

Beyond Bantry is Glengarriff, of which Thackeray wrote that "such a bay, were it lying upon English shores, would be a world's wonder". I have only seen it off the deck of a steamer, away in a smother of cloud; but everyone confirms Thackeray. Castletown Beare, farther west on the north shore of Bantry Bay, I have seen, and the Castle of Dunboy, where was the seat of the O'Sullivan Beare, lord of this region, from which after the rout at Kinsale he and his people fled in a body, marching north amid dreadful privations till they crossed the Shannon and ultimately reached some protection in Ulster. But O'Sullivan's fighting men were left in the Castle under their captain MacGeoghegan, who prolonged resistance to the point of desperation against Carew's artillery. Mortally wounded at last, he succumbed in an attempt to reach the magazine to blow all, assailants and defenders, sky high. It would have been better for the garrison had he succeeded, since Carew hanged every man of them. There is the ruin to-day, breached and battered, standing in a grove of ilex on a very beautiful promontory.

That Castle of Dunboy gave its name to Froude's famous romance *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy*—a romance founded on historic fact—perhaps not more coloured in the telling than in the same author's volumes on the history of Ireland. For here in this peninsula between Bantry Bay and the Kenmare River, which was the special hold of the O'Sullivans, clan loyalty and the clan name did not die out. Here as elsewhere, English settlers were brought in as lords of the land, with enormous power over the native Irish, whose loyalty still held to the representative of their old chiefs. The O'Sullivans were chiefs now principally in the extensive smuggling operations—and let it be remembered that under the laws made by England to crush out Irish trade, contraband was almost the one outlet for Irish commerce. If Irishmen wanted to export the wool of their sheep, the hides of their cattle, the meat that they salted, all this traffic was by law forbidden. Such laws make smuggling necessary and beneficent, and the O'Sullivans on the south of the Kenmare River, like the O'Connells on its northern shore, brought in their cargoes of wine, tobacco, silks, and laces, and sent back ships laden with wool. With those cargoes went out too that other contraband, the supply of officers and men for the Irish brigade. The English landlord-settler was the representative of English law, and between him and the O'Sullivans conflict was certain. In 1754, Murtagh Oge O'Sullivan shot the Puxley of that day. Law was moved to great efforts, and two months later the O'Sullivan was

surrounded in his house at the village of Eyeries, and, after a desperate resistance, driven out of it by fire: he tried to cut his way out but was shot down in escaping. That was a great day for the law, and they towed O'Sullivan's body by a rope at the stern of a king's ship to Cork, where they cut his head off and spiked it over the city gate.

ENTRANCE TO CORK HARBOUR

Irish memory keeps vividly the detail of such events, and you can find men in that district to tell you the whole as if it had happened yesterday. I heard it all, though at secondhand, on a sail from the Kenmare River to Bantry, one night when the sea was all fire, and the mackerel shoals dashing this way and that, made flashes like a Catherine wheel, and porpoises or dolphins following them left long trails of light on the surface with sudden sparkles wherever the great fish came up to roll. Out to sea was the recurring flash of the Bull Light, for which ships steer on their way from America; and though there was no moon I could still distinguish this huge island rock, and its neighbour the Cow. The Calf, where the light used to be, is lower, and lies close in by Dursey Island—in that year much talked of, for a party of police who had crossed to collect rents from the few islanders, were effectively

marooned, as the boat they had chartered left them, and every other craft was suddenly spirited away.

I think, perhaps, that night was lovelier on the Kenmare River—under a sky ablaze with stars—than even the days of sun had been; but nothing else in Ireland is so perfect, to my fancy, as this long, narrow sea lough between the two mountainous peninsulas, and having inland of it the full vista of those higher mountains which encircle Killarney's lakes.

On the Kenmare shore of the southern peninsula is Lord Lansdowne's famous seat, Derreen, set among rivers and lakes, and backed with mountains. Derreen means the little oak grove, and as Mr. Cooke well observes in his *Murray*, the native wooding here escaped "the general destruction" of the forest trees to feed the iron furnaces of Sir William Petty, ancestor of the Lansdowne family. Most of the woods of Ireland—and Munster was covered with timber in Elizabeth's reign—were ruthlessly squandered in this way, during the first century of English occupation, by grantees or purchasers of confiscated land, whose one idea was a savage exploitation of what could immediately be cashed. However, let it be said that Petty's successors, coming into great part of the Desmond inheritance, and adopting the Desmond name, Fitzmaurice, took high place among that Irish nobility of the latter type. They were not absentees but landowners with some sense of what was owing to their estates, and with a sentiment to the country from which they drew their revenues, which is best evidenced by their close friendship with Maria Edgeworth and Thomas Moore. Yet it was always at Bowood, in Wiltshire, that Miss Edgeworth and Moore knew the great Whig statesman and his belongings: neither the poet nor the novelist ever penetrated to Derreen.

Had they done so, they might have learnt more than ever either of them came to realize about the greatest Irishman of their day—the greatest power that has ever come out of purely Celtic Ireland in modern times: for Iveragh, the peninsula over against Derreen, was the birthplace and the home of Daniel O'Connell; it gave the climate and the environment which determined him to what he was.

I am not going to write much—because no writing can do it justice—of Iveragh, which is bounded on the south by the Kenmare River, on the north by Dingle Bay, on the west by the Atlantic Ocean (with the Skelligs lying off in

it), and on the east by Magillicuddy's Reeks and the lakes of Killarney; which is set therefore in beauty and majesty and splendour and has interest and charm at every turn of every road. But I am going to write a little of Daniel O'Connell and his people, for it is stupid to go to Kerry, and know nothing of the greatest Kerryman that ever lived, only—first, a little practical geography.

IV

The train will take you to Kenmare, where the railway company has a really comfortable hotel, in whose garden you will see the characteristic subtropical vegetation which can be produced in this climate—palms, yuccas, New Zealand flax with its sword-shaped fronds, bamboos, and the rest, "all standing naked in the open air" like the heathen goddesses in the Groves of Blarney. From Kenmare the beautifully engineered road, which was a joy to man and beast till heavy motor coaches began to destroy it, runs along the north shore of the sea lough and a few miles out crosses the Kerry Blackwater by the most picturesque bridge over the loveliest stream that anyone could ever hope to throw a fly in. A little farther along is Parknasilla, the big hotel which has been built at a point where the coast breaks up into a number of wooded islets, with bridges connecting them, and meandering walks—well, nothing could be prettier. Then you go along through Sneem, getting into opener, wilder country. As you approach West Cove, Staigue Fort is on your right, a great circular structure of dry masonry, more developed than the similar buildings in Aran, for it has chambers in the thickness of the wall and stairs leading to platforms for defence. From this monument of prehistoric times, whose date can be measured by thousands of years, look across to your left, where another stone building is in progress—a large hospital designed to benefit the poor folk of this district: the bounty of a lady belonging to one of the families who profited by confiscation and for too long drew absentee rents. What may be the success of the scheme cannot be foretold: but the beauty of her desire to make restitution is not the least among the beauties of the Kenmare River.

At West Cove I have been lucky enough to stay with the man who knows the west of Ireland in its present life and its past history better perhaps than any living soul. In the great plot where cars draw up outside his door, great plants of Arum lilies shoot up and flourish, blooming luxuriantly in spring. They say that in Valentia an improving gardener thought them too profuse in the Knight of Kerry's garden, and pitched the roots out over the cliffs; but some caught on ledges, fastened there, and sent up white lilies in niches of the crags—so kind is that soft air.

Two or three miles beyond West Cove is the village of Caherdaniel and under it comes in Darrynane Bay, on whose shore is a little hotel, simple enough, but friendly; lying among Irish fisher folk who gather of a summer evening to dance on the crisp turf that covers the sand. Beside it is a small wood, and in the wood is Darrynane, a place of pilgrimage, for here O'Connell lived and here his descendants remain. The case of the O'Connells was typical. Driven by Cromwell out of the fertile lands of Limerick they took root among the mountains of Kerry and of Clare. The builder of Darrynane—that is of the original habitation—was a Daniel or Donal who married a daughter of the O'Donoghues—another great Kerry clan. This lady—Máire Dubh—was a fruitful mother of children—she bore twenty-two of them and brought twelve to full age; but she was also notable as a poetess in the Irish tongue. Her second son, Maurice, inherited Darrynane, and was known all over the country as Hunting Cap O'Connell, for a tax was put on beaver hats, and from that day he wore nothing but the velvet cap in which he was used to hunt hare and fox on the mountains of Iveragh. Daniel O'Connell, his nephew, was a great votary of that sport, and I have talked with a man who had hunted in his company. And still in autumn you may see the harriers out on these hills and a namesake and descendant of his hallooing them on.

KENMARE BAY, FROM TEMPLENOE

Old Hunting Cap as head of the family played a great part in his nephew's youth, providing, it would seem, for the later stages of his education. The early one was cheap enough, for he was fostered on the mountains in the cabin of his father's herd (that tie of fosterage bound Catholic Ireland together, gentle and simple, with a strange intimacy), and he got his first lessons in one of the hedge schools which flourished in defiance of penal laws. It was no less typical of Catholic Ireland that he should go abroad to finish his training, or that he should have a kinsman high placed in the service of France. His father's younger brother, Count O'Connell, was the last colonel of the Irish Brigade: and when he was consulted concerning a place to send his nephews, in 1790, found himself much perplexed to answer, so troubled was the state of all the Continent. Daniel and his brother Maurice were sent first to the Jesuits at St. Omer; they were trained to detest the revolution which was driving their uncle out of the service of France: and soon the flood of turmoil drove them from Douay whither they had moved. At Calais, they learnt the news of Louis XVI's execution: on the boat were two passengers who spoke of it as willing eyewitnesses. These men were Irish Protestants, the brothers Sheares, afterwards executed for conspiracy. It is very notable that although Protestant Ireland, especially in Ulster, was much affected by the revolutionary and republican doctrines, these found very little echo in the Catholic part of the nation—and none at all among survivors of the old Catholic gentry, such as the O'Connells. Yet when the young O'Connell settled down to read for the bar in London, harsh measures of repression and the violent Toryism of that day soon drove him into revolt. He had a genuine hatred of oppression, of unfair play: later in life this devoutest of Roman Catholics was the most powerful advocate of equality for the Jews.

However, this is no place to talk of the great orator's career or his triumphs. To his own folk in Kerry he was always "the Counsellor", the wonderful advocate whose genius was like a flaming sword drawn for the terrified prisoner. No other Irish leader has ever been so near akin to the common folk; it was not for nothing he suckled the breast of a Kerry peasant, and learnt to speak his first words in the Irish tongue. Yet, oddly enough and pathetically enough, so little of a "nationalist" in our modern sense was he, that he welcomed and encouraged the growing disuse of Irish speech; all

diversity of tongues seemed hateful to him, in his eighteenth-century cosmopolitanism. But no man was ever more in love with Ireland, or more devoted to one spot of earth than he to his Darrynane. He wrote to Walter Savage Landor of himself that he "was born within the sound of the everlasting wave", and that his "dreamy boyhood fed its fancies upon the ancient and long-faded glories of that land which preserved Christianity when the rest of now civilized Europe was shrouded in the darkness of godless ignorance".

> "Perhaps," he went on, "if I could show you the calm and exquisite beauty of these capacious bays and mountain promontories, softened in the pale moonlight which shines this lovely evening, till all which during the day was grand and terrific has become serene in the silent tranquillity of the clear night—perhaps you would readily admit that the man who has so often been called a ferocious demagogue is in truth a gentle lover of nature, an enthusiast of all her beauties 'fond of each gentle and each dreary scene', and catching from the loveliness as well as from the dreariness of the ocean and the Alpine scenes with which it is surrounded, a greater ardour to procure the good of man in his overwhelming admiration of the mighty works of God."

That was how O'Connell thought of Kerry; and as you drive on from Caherdaniel along the high pass of Coomakista, which brings you out across a shoulder of mountain from the view across Kenmare River to a wider outlook full west on the Atlantic—why, you will have some inkling of the sublimity which he felt.

Below you is the little harbour to and from which the O'Connells worked their smuggling craft; and you can discern a narrow cleft in the rocks making a short cut for row boats on a calm day. Once, they say, a sloop of the smugglers lay in the harbour and was suddenly aware of a revenue brig rounding the headland from the south. The wind blew into the harbour. It was impossible to escape, and the sloop lay motionless and to all appearance idle. But just as the pursuer tacked and ran straight into the harbour mouth a sail was hoisted on the sloop, she began to move, and in a minute her sides were scraping through the tiny passage, while men with sweeps out fended

her off this and that sunken rock; and in another minute she was out and away, cracking on full sail with a good half-hour's lead before the revenue boat could beat out of the narrow sound to chase her.

MACGILLICUDDY'S REEKS

From Coomakista the road descends steeply to Waterville, a famous place for anglers, where a new town has grown up about the outlet to Lough Currane, for here is now the chief station of the transatlantic cables. The first of these cables was laid from Valentia Island some ten miles farther north opposite the town of Cahirciveen, which will be your destination if you purpose to return by rail along the shore of Dingle Bay. But I commend to all, motorist, cyclist, or foot traveller (if such a one be left in these degenerate days), another way of exploring Iveragh. Also, if the sea is not your enemy, it is worth while to stay in Waterville—where the sea as well as the lake offer great chance to fishers—and try an expedition to the Skellig Rocks. Fine weather is needed, for there is difficulty in landing on these astonishing places where the gannets are the chief habitants: strong flyers, they nest nowhere between this point and the Bass Rock in Scotland, yet you may see them by dozens anywhere along the west coast even in the breeding season.

On the Skelligs are old stone stairs of tremendous height, the work of old-time anchorite monks who established themselves here in stone beehive-shaped cells—still intact, for you to wonder at the discomforts of piety. And in the crevices of these rocks rare birds breed—the stormy petrel, the Manx shearwater, along with legions of puffin, guillemot, razorbill, shag, and the rest. But do not go there even with a light easterly wind, for it blows direct on to the rocky landing place; and if it blows at all from the south-west the swell may be too big even on the sheltered side. Nature is on a big scale, a rough playfellow, out here in the Atlantic.

Even landward from Lough Currane, it is a wild nature that you must encounter on the old mountain road to Killarney, which you should travel for choice.

This way follows up the valley of the Eany River (but you may take the main road skirting Lough Currane and turn in west to this same valley at Owroe bridge) to the pass of *Bealach Oisin* (Ossian's Track) between Coolee and Knocknagapple. At the crest one must be close on a thousand feet up, and the view back over Ballinskelligs bay with the Atlantic beyond, to which the eye is led by a long winding thread of river between steep mountain sides, is a splendid prospect. Once over the neck, sea, river, and tilled land all disappear: nothing is seen but heath and rock and mountain. On the right is the high ridge which makes the backbone of Iveragh: in front of you the Reeks fill the eastern sky. Not a house can be seen—and there are very few places in Ireland (so thickly scattered are people over the poorest land) from which human habitation cannot be discerned.

A few miles down brings you into the valley of the Caragh river which flows out from Loughs Reagh and Cloon and after a course of some ten miles enters the long and deep Caragh Lake, whence another short run brings it to the sea. This is the valley which lies west of the Reeks, and, for my own part, I count this aspect of them finer than anything you will see at Killarney. There is a big, new hotel at the outfall of Caragh Lake on the railway, much frequented now: but all my time among these hills and waters has been given to a little oldfashioned anglers' inn, the Glencar hotel, on the reach of river between Bealalaw bridge and Lickeen rapids. Here you may fish for salmon at a nominal charge in one of the best waters in Ireland: on the evening when I got there this summer, they were jumping everywhere in the beautiful Long Range

pool where the little Caragh joins the main stream; red, ugly fish, it must be owned, for this was in September and they had lain there since June without a fresh to move them—but still there were salmon and plenty of them. Or you can fish free of charge at Lough Acoose at the headwaters of Caraghbeg, in under the flank of Carrantuohil, with better prospect of a full basket than anywhere else known to me. The trout are not big anywhere in Kerry, but in Acoose they run to a good herring size, and the man who fished it the day when I was at Glencar got something over two dozen—a usual bag. My companion and I had gone farther afield, to the headwaters of Caragh itself, right up into the great ring of mountains through which the pass of Bealachbeama lets you out to the Kenmare side. Little need be said about our fishing, which was interrupted by the fact that our boat, leaking like a sieve, finally foundered while we were trying to get her ashore—a new boat too, wanting nothing but a couple of good coats of paint. Yet the chance which drove us off Cloon, while the boat was being got ashore and emptied, sent us up across a mile of bog to fish the upper lake from the shore; and what a lake! lying right in under the steep side of a mountain almost precipitous, where the eagles built till a year or two back, and for three parts of its circumference ringed about like the crater of a volcano.

It was a day of dry wind, northerly to north-easterly, and of hard lights: one lacked the magical enchantment of westerly air over the whole: yet for sheer grandeur I do not know that all my wanderings after fish in Ireland have ever taken me to so fine a scene.

THE GAP OF DUNLOE, KILLARNEY

That little hotel, primitive in its equipment but most friendly, has its attractions to offer all the year round, for the salmon fishing begins in earnest in February, and through the winter months there is rough shooting (grouse, cock, and snipe), to be had over the great expanses of heather and those broad belts of native wooding which grow about the river in its lower course. From the hotel down to the lake your path lies between this scrub of oak and holly and birch and a water, swift yet deep, where pool succeeds pool, each divided from the next only by strong rapids. You have no monopoly there: the river is fished from both banks and can be covered right across, though it needs a good man to do it; but it is practically a free fishing and the best free river fishing that I know in Ireland—absolutely an ideal spot for the holiday-maker who does not insist on being near the sea. You can walk from it all the finest mountains in Kerry since it lies in the very centre: and away west of you is Glenbeigh, another valley where decent quarters can be had amid landscape of the same type. Of the same type—but I cannot believe that anywhere in Kerry or out of it you will match the journey which convoyed me from Glencar to my next stage at the Caragh Lake hotel. It was inland scenery no doubt, but the breath and the feeling of the sea is over all

this neck of sea-washed Iveragh, and that river valley seemed no more than an avenue through the hills leading to the gateway of ocean. We walked along the river bank, often shoulder high in fern, often stopping to pull the blackberry clusters, and we studied the pools set in, here among trees, there with open sward on both sides and moor stretching away behind. Below the rapids we took boat, and for a mile or more rowed through level bogland, with groups of Scotch fir, purple stemmed in the afternoon light, rising from the river bank. Between their trunks, or in the open gaps, we could see the peaked mass of Carrantuohil, rising in the south-east, the light on its high ridges, but the valleys and chasms on its sides deep in shadow. As we neared the lake the flat land broadened, and from across it came the aromatic, pungent smell of bog myrtle, distinct as the scent from a beanfield, but strong and tonic as brine. Then for an hour and half we paddled down the lake between mountain and mountain, winding round promontory after promontory into sight of reach after reach of the lake. Finally as we entered the wide northern stretch—for our course was due north—all the shore was seen divided into demesnes, big and little, each with its own wooding. The hotel lies farthest of all towards the river's outflow in the north-west, and whoever chose that site deserves credit, for across the wide shining water rise the whole ring of mountains—Carrantuohil away to the south-east, and all the other heights that close in the valley behind Cloon Lake and Bealachbeama spreading fan-wise across the horizon as you look out from the pleasant terrace where palm and hydrangea grow. It is not so finished, not so exquisite, as Killarney; but I should rather choose it for a holiday. I sat on the terrace for an hour that Sunday and watched the sunlight fade off Carrantuohil: all was green and olive when we sat down, for it was a coldish evening and the air northerly; but cloud lay on the peaks, or rather caught the peaks intermittently as it drifted in wreaths across, so that at no time was the whole mountain visible. But gradually as the sun sank these wreaths became touched with a rosy glow, and below them what had been olive-green took on deep tints of coppery purple, rich and glowing, the purple gaining as the rose deepened on the cloud wreath; and higher and higher the shaft of light struck, reaching now only the very topmost pinnacles, till finally it faded out, and all lay before as in a sombre stillness waiting for the fall of night.

Nothing that I carry away from Killarney haunts me with the same fullness of beauty, but perhaps only because Killarney is no one's discovery; it has no

secret lover. You might as well seek to praise Sarah Bernhardt's genius or Tennyson's charm of style. Yet I suppose each one will discern for himself some passing perfection, some special facet of that loveliness—as I indeed remember the wonderful, shadowed, lucid green of water reflecting darkly the bank of tall reeds which grow westward of the landing stage to which we rowed in after fishing: and remember, too, the singular sight of a man's naked body, as he stood poised before plunging in to bathe, some hundred yards from us; for the low sun caught his figure, outlined against the long line of dark foliage behind him, and made it at once the glowing centre of a beautiful landscape.

This was on the lower lake, largest by far of the three which form a crescent, compassing from south to north (as the water runs) the eastern flank of the Reeks.

My last visit found me at the Victoria Hotel where the lake is broad and open to the Purple Mountain, a noble landscape: but to reach what is my idea of Killarney proper, you must row across to the narrows between the lovely isle of Inisfallen and the east shore, so reaching Ross Bay and a more confined water, studded over with island rocks. Here the shores are of that peculiar limestone which the lapping of water frets into numberless quaint crannies and fissures till the verge of the water looks as though it were a frame intricately carved by some patient craftsman; and in all these chinks and crevices ferns and other wild and beautiful herbage grow with exquisite profusion. That is what makes to my mind the essence of Killarney's charm, this wealth of intricate detail making a foreground to mountain and lake scenery as bold and wild as any highlands can show. Add to this the presence of unfamiliar foliage, here native, exotic everywhere else—notably the arbutus with its dark, glossy leaf and ruddy stem, handsomest of all shrubs; dark yew also, and juniper, mingled in with native growth of oak and birch, yet through all, skilful plantation has set in this and that graceful foreign tree, this and that bright berry. It is no wonder that such a place should have become one of the world's great tourist centres, especially when to these beauties are added the distinction and interest of fine ruins—Ross Castle where the O'Donoghues were lords till Cromwell's forces drove them out; Inisfallen where St. Finian's pious monks had their abbey through untroubled centuries. And, being as it is, Killarney is equipped for the tourist as is no other place in Ireland: all the excursions have been thought and planned, and

your hotelkeeper will have arrangements fully made; nor is the plague of beggars at all the annoyance that it used to be—a blessed reform. The boatmen have learnt their trade of cicerone to perfection, and will not only tell you the standard yarns and jests and legends of the place if you desire them, but will have the tact to discriminate serious-minded folk—such as anglers—who may probably not want this form of entertainment.

MUCKROSS LAKE, KILLARNEY

Yet, for all that, it is a place for tourists, and, as such, commands only my reluctant tribute. But the drive from Killarney to Kenmare which, skirting Muckross and the upper lake, carries you gradually circling round the whole crescent till you rise into the Black Valley where the Gap of Dunloe breaks in—well, that drive, I must say, fairly broke down my coldness: I grew no less enthusiastic than the famous Scottish expert on salmon fishing who was of the party and declared the whole thing equal to the Trossachs—from which I gather that Scotland at least has not anything to show more fair. Moreover, fishing on the lakes is free and good; there is a chance of salmon, and trout are both plenty and sizeable. That is to say, on a good day they should average close on half a pound, and this means that a pound fish is no great

rarity—as he certainly would be in Glencar. Also in Killarney town you have the best fly tier in Ireland; many a friend of mine in Donegal who never saw Kerry could swear to Mr. Courtney's work in this delicate craft, almost an art in itself.

But that is all I have to say about "Heaven's reflex, Killarney".

V

My last visit to Kerry was on a commission of enquiry into fisheries which took us driving round in motors to places off the usual track; and a railway strike came in, to complete our survey of West Munster. We had come up from Waterville, along the backbone of the peninsula, crossing Bealach Oisin, so that the coast road by Dingle Bay is known to me now only by far-off memory of a forty-miles drive in a long car—which the railway has for many years superseded. But I revived my memory of a bit of it, coming up in the morning from Caragh Lake to Killorglin, where we held our court, at the outfall of the Lowne which drains the lakes of Killarney. Opposite us across the bay was that other mountainous region of Corcaguiney, the Dingle Peninsula, which differs from Iveragh in this, that from the high point of the Reeks Iveragh slopes westward by a gradual declension of peaks and ridges; whereas Corcaguiney rises continuously westward and seaward till it reaches its climax in Brandon Hill rising majestically from the very limit of the land. So rises Mweelrea at the mouth of Killery, and I imagine that on a clear day from Brandon's top you would see Mweelrea, and from Mweelrea again might distinguish the peak of Errigal far north in Donegal. At all events I knew an old gentleman who told me that he had seen the whole length of Ireland in one field of vision, and he took either Mweelrea or Croagh Patrick as his midland centre and Errigal or Brandon (or the Reeks) as his two extremes.

This Dingle Peninsula is explored by very few, unexplored by me, alas! I could see from the road the dark outline of Cahirconree, a wonderful stone fort, built two thousand feet up on the side of the Sliabh Mish mountains: and away out to the west the Blasket Islands were in sight, hardly more accessible than the Skelligs, but inhabited by a race of Irish-speaking fisher folk, among whom a Norse student of the Celtic languages settled himself the other day and was overjoyed to find a stone inscription in Runic characters, containing the mind of some Scandinavian forebear of his own, set down in the Norse that was spoken a thousand years ago and had waited ten centuries for him to decipher it.

Under Brandon, on the extreme west of the peninsula, lies Smerwick Bay, where in Elizabeth's reign a small detachment of Spaniards landed and established themselves; their earthworks at Fort del Oro (so called because Frobisher was wrecked there with a cargo of pyrites which he took to be gold) can be traced easily. Kingsley in *Westward Ho!* has dealt, not overfaithfully, with the story of that enterprise which ended in the wholesale butchery of combatants who surrendered at discretion—suggesting, very unworthily, that the brutal deed was excused by its deterrent effect. We have never heard that it stopped the landing at Kinsale not many years later. There is ground to hope that Raleigh has been wrongfully charged with the actual perpetration of that black deed. But in truth the blackest chapter in all Irish history is precisely that which deals with the Desmond wars under Elizabeth, which ended in the complete devastation of this lovely province. Not far from Tralee they show you the spot where the last Earl of Desmond was captured and the rough mound a little way from it that marks his grave: and still when the moaning of wind and wave is heard over that countryside, they call it the Desmond's keene.

BRICKEEN BRIDGE, LOWER LAKE, KILLARNEY

To escape from all this record of civilized barbarity, the mind gladly turns back to far older and by far less barbarous days. Brandon keeps the name of the most picturesque figure in the long roll of Irish saints—St. Brendan, the Navigator, who was born a little west of Tralee, at Barra, close to the promontory of Fenit, in or about the year 484. He was baptized by a bishop named Erc, whose name still lingers in Termon Eirc, a townland three miles north of Ardfert: and a well near Ardfert which keeps St. Brendan's name is still a place of pilgrimage and votive offering, more specially on the saint's own day. Under Erc's guidance the lad was brought up, though he got some of his schooling at Killeady, the convent where St. Ita had established her religious house near Newcastle West in county Limerick. Later, Erc sent him to travel that he might "see the lives of some of the holy fathers in Erin"; and he went north to Connacht where the school of St. Jarlath at Tuam was already famous (as Archbishop Healy, who sits in St. Jarlath's chair to-day, tells with natural pride in his book on the *Ancient Schools and Scholars of Ireland*, which I am pillaging, not for the first time). He went farther north still in Connacht, and is said to have established a settlement of Kerrymen in the plains near Castlebar; but he returned to Kerry to get his priestly orders from the hands of his tutor Erc, now nearing death.

"It was probably at this time," says Archbishop Healy, "that St. Brendan built his oratory on the summit of Brandon hill", and there was fired with the project of setting sail across the Atlantic in search of a Promised Land—*Tir-nan-Og*, the Country of the Young. For there on Brandon top, a man can see —even without the vision of faith—"over half the south of Ireland, mountain and valley, lake and stream, plain and town, stretching far away to the east and south. But the eye ever turns seaward to the grand panorama presented by the ultimate ocean." Brendan from his watch tower

> "Saw it in all its varying moods—but above all, at even, when the setting sun went to his caverns below the sea, and the line of light along the glowing west seemed a road to the Fortunate Islands where the sorrows of earth never enter, and peace and beauty for ever dwell. It was a dim tradition of man's lost paradise, floating down the stream of time, for with curious unanimity the poets and sages both of Greece and Rome spoke of these Islands of the Blessed as located somewhere in the Western Ocean. The same idea from the earliest times has taken strong hold of the Celtic

> imagination, and reveals itself in many strange tales, which were extremely popular, especially with the peasantry on the western coast. To this day the existence of Hi Brasail, an enchanted land of joy and beauty, is very confidently believed by our western fishermen. It is seen from Aran once every seven years, as Brendan saw it in olden times, like a fairy city on the far horizon's verge."

According to the records, Brendan was not first on this quest. Barinthus, a neighbouring monk, had fared seaward in search of a truant brother and had found him in the island called "Delicious", from which they sailed yet farther west and found other wonders. But at all events, however moved, Brendan bade his monks to fast with him forty days, then choosing fourteen of them, he built a great curragh, with ribs and frame of willow, hide-covered, and so with forty days of provisions they set out upon the trackless sea, steering for the "summer solstice".

Seven years that voyage lasted: they reached island after island in the Atlantic main, "following God's guidance, fed by his Providence, and protected by his power". At length, it is said, they reached the continent of America and found the place where they landed "to be indeed a delicious country abounding in everything to gratify the palate and please the eye"; and they were about to push across the swift, silvery current that had borne them to the verge of this land, when an angel rose before their path and bid them turn homeward, instead of resting to enjoy. And so back to Ireland came Brendan the Navigator, the travelled Ulysses among Irish saints.

What lies behind all this, who knows exactly? but certainly those dwellers on the outermost verge of Europe always had vague yet glorious rumours of a land beyond the sea—a land in truth whose flotsam and jetsam, strange nuts and weeds, the ocean current casts from time to time on their shores. And heaven knows, that this Western people, since Columbus brought promise into fulfilment and imagining into sure knowledge, have found in the west there a haven, a refuge from the miseries into which they were born. America has been a strange and often a sinister realization of the Fortunate Islands—yet conceive of Ireland's history for the past century without America to lean on, to look to for help. Its streets have not been paved with gold, no easily-won sustenance has been there: yet to the fisher folk and farmers it has

offered the fulfilment of desire, the enlargement of aspiration; and the course that St. Brendan first charted, though it is more frequented now than could be wished, though it leads often enough to unhappy wreckage, has yet been to Ireland a blessed road.

HOLY ISLAND, LOUGH DERG

No man who visits this Atlantic seaboard of Ireland but must feel something of what Archbishop Healy's eloquence hints at—the sense of an open gateway beyond the sun-track through which imagination is beckoned towards its own goal. There is a soothing and restful influence from those vast spaces of the west. And even landward it follows you. We crossed the neck of the Dingle Peninsula to the pretty and prosperous town of Tralee, and all eastern Kerry merging into Limerick stretched away to right of us, a wide rolling expanse of land well divided into fields for tillage. Our course lay still on north-east to Listowel, crossing the tract of land which divides Tralee Bay from the Shannon's broad estuary; all about us, the country was spacious, yet well inhabited, set thick with trim little farmhouses: there was much traffic on the roads, of horse and man—and of asses: I saw there what is not common, two donkeys driven abreast in a little cart, stepping very smart

down a long hill. There was plenty of room for the people, yet the people were there—on the land, living by the land, with the large air of the Atlantic blowing in across them. Next day, since the trains were not running, we had to proceed by motor to Limerick, and we simply ran north to the Shannon shore at Tarbert and followed the river to Limerick for a matter of forty miles, stretch by stretch, a broad sea lane for vessels, but alas! no vessels there: hardly a sail on the waters; though battleships can lie at Foynes, thirty miles in from Loop Head.

There is much to pause over on that route: Glin, where the hereditary Knights of Glin, an offshoot of the Desmond Geraldines, have maintained themselves, for a matter of seven centuries, even through the "pacifications" of Elizabeth's reign: Askeaton, many miles farther on, a chief seat of the main Desmond line, and in Ireland—so rich in ruins, so poor in buildings that have escaped destruction—there are few finer ruins than the Desmond Castle here, and the Franciscan Abbey. Still nearer Limerick, at Carrigagunnel, you see the landmark of another power, for this castle was built by the O'Briens of Thomond and it stood over against Bunratty on the Clare bank, another great fortress.—Yet a mere catalogue is without interest, and here is no space to trace the interlocking fortunes and conflicts of Norman noble, Irish chief, and Cromwellian soldier.

Let me concentrate on one spot, one group of memories. Above the little town of Foynes is a small house on a hill, now beautifully surrounded by plantations of shrubs and flowers; it was the home of a lady known to the Irish people at home and abroad, for her work in improving the lot of steerage passengers on emigrant ships, and also for her writings in prose and verse; yet known better as the true child of a notable father, William Smith O'Brien, Protestant, landlord, aristocrat, rebel, and felon by the law. She was one who felt and loved the beauty of Ireland—not only what one may call the scenic beauty of such places as Killarney, but the essential spacious beauty of those fertile valleys, those wide skies.

> "Men come and go by this great river," she wrote, "and the revelation of its beauty is not made to them fully, often not at all; but let one live by it and it is the most beautiful place in the whole world.... But to-night it was no hidden beauty. I went down by the river in the evening. It was full, the tide just past the turn,

> and sweeping down the great mass of water at an extraordinary pace, and yet, though the whole river was swinging along at many miles an hour, the surface was a marvellous mirror. The glowing masses of furze on the island, a quarter-mile away, were so near and distinct in the wave, one could almost stretch out a hand to gather them. Every cloud and every shade of light and colour in the sky was again in the river, but far more intense. At my feet and twenty yards down and across the channel was a dense black cloud reflected, its crenellated edge cut sharp against the reflection of silver, blue, grey, and intense white light stretching far away westward. I stood, as the old books used to say, 'entranced', and still the river swept down, and still the furze and the wonderful green and the dark cloud-bar were, as it were, under my hand, and the glorious 'gates of the Shannon', as the Elizabethans called this Foynes, were opened to heaven's light beyond my touch."

From the road just beyond Foynes towards Limerick, you shall see a round hill topped by a ruin and the tokens of a graveyard. There in the high windy burial-place of her choice she lies, this lover of Ireland and of the Shannon, Charlotte Grace O'Brien. And for the last word in this little book, I, her near kinsman, whose main ties are with other provinces, shall set down another passage of her writings, which is curiously revealing of Munster. For behind Knockpatrick you may see a few miles farther off another low hill which is topped by a well-marked mound, and on the mound a great mass of shattered masonry stands, "like a black clenched fist thrust against the western heavens". That is Shanid, the original stronghold of the southern Geraldines: "Shanid aboo", was their war-cry.

To this place Charlotte O'Brien, who loved flowers hardly less even than other live things, came to look for a reported rare plant—"The Virgin Mary's Thistle", "so-called because the leaves are all blotched and marbled with white stains, and legend made it a sacred plant bearing for ever stains of the Blessed Virgin's milk".

> "Sure enough," she wrote, "I found a mass of it growing together only on the southern exposure under the great wall. Now this plant is said to exist only as an introduced species in the British

> Isles. To account for it, therefore, on this utterly lonely and desolate hilltop, we must look back through the centuries and see the sacred plant in the monastery garden at Askeaton—the first Geraldine home in Desmond. We must think how the seed may—in fact, must—have been carried up to this watch tower, perhaps by some long-haired daughter of the Geraldines, sent for safety to the mountain fortress. We must imagine how its frail growth (only annual) took hold on the sheltered side; we must see generation after generation of men swept away, the monastery torn down and desecrated, the name of Desmond almost forgotten, the great Geraldine race broken and destroyed: we must see the almost impregnable castle blown to pieces and left as a trampling ground for summer-heated cattle; more wonderful than all, we must realize that time has so gone, that no record is left us of that great downfall and destruction—nothing—nothing but a few pieces of nine-foot-thick wall, a few earth mounds, and the sacred plant. Irishmen! What national history lies in one seed of that plant!"

True enough! And true it is that to feel the real beauty of Ireland, her mountains and valleys, her fields and waters, you must see them in the light of the past as well as the present, informed by knowledge and by love.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

At the Villafield Press, Glasgow, Scotland

Transcriber's Notes

Minor punctuation errors were silently corrected. Illustrations were moved to paragraph breaks. Click on the illustrations to see larger images.

Page 24: Changed Roscarberry to Roscarbery.

back

back

back

back

back

back

back

back

back

back

back

back