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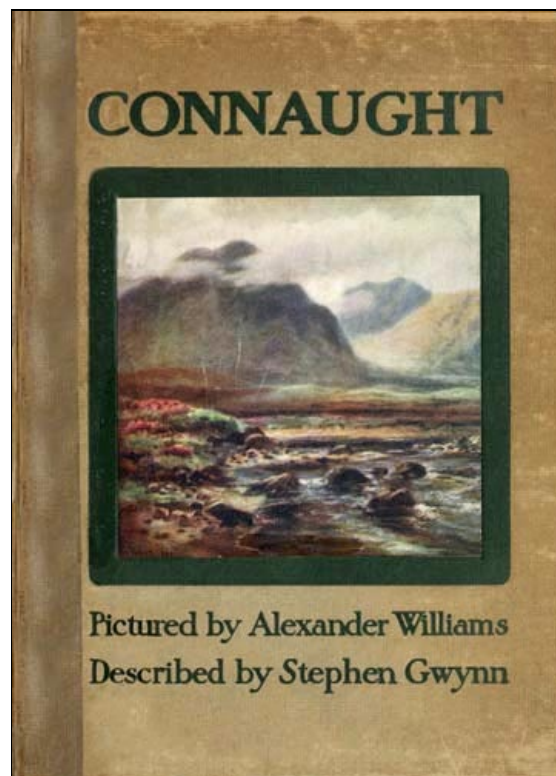
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LOUGH BREENBANNIA

CONNAUGHT

Described by Stephen Gwynn

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Beautiful Ireland

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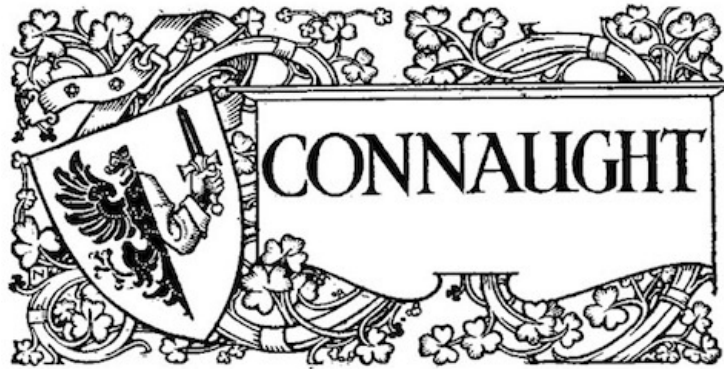
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Connaught—or Connacht, as it is more properly spelt and spoken—is geographically the best-marked among the provinces of Ireland; and, as usual, other discriminations follow. I would not say that it is of all provinces the most Irish; nobody has better rights to stand for Ireland than the "boys of Wexford", and at a Wexford fair or meeting you will see scores of big farmers the very picture of Mr. Punch's John Bull, only not so round about the abdomen. But Connaught, Connaughtmen, and Connaught ways certainly come nearest to an Englishman's traditional conception of Ireland and its inhabitants; the stage Irishman is based upon Connaught characteristics. In West Mayo people do say "shtruck" (or in moments of emotion "shhtruck"); and you can see still in places the traditional costumes. Shawled heads and bare feet are (thank goodness) to be met with all along the Atlantic seaboard; but the red petticoat (home-dyed with madder, though alas! aniline dyes are fast replacing the costlier and more beautiful crimson) is characteristic of Galway and Mayo; and in remote recesses of Joyce country and Connemara old and lovely fashions of braiding the hair and training ringlets to stray over the forehead still hold their own. In Connemara and on Aran, the tall lad of thirteen may still, though rarely, be seen in the long-petticoated shirt (his only garment) of red or blue flannel; but this is only a relic of sheer poverty. The men's clothes, however, keep to antique and excellent fashions: throughout Galway, east of the Corrib, almost everyone wears the cut-away skirted coat of dark heavy frieze, and for the most part its wearers hold to the custom of clean-shaven face with a narrow strip of close-cropped whisker past the cheekbones. In Connemara the "bawneen" or sleeved waistcoat of whitish flannel is general and very becoming to its wearers, among whom are to be found the handsomest men in Ireland. Kerry women, who in certain parts really have the "black-blue Irish hair and Irish eyes", may perhaps hold their own even with the girls of Connaught; but for fine-looking men I would back Galway against any county in the British Isles.

There is much talk of a Spanish strain on this coast, and undoubtedly commerce was constant between Galway Bay and the Iberian peninsula: but the truth is that you have in western Ireland, as in western Spain, survivals of a race which the red-haired people pushed off the good lands towards the limit of the sea. On the Claddagh at Galway I have seen a man at work in his cottage mending a net, who might have posed for the model of a Basque peasant; and the olive-skinned fisher folk about the great mackerel-curing station at Cleggan (near Clifden) are simply variants of a type that repeats itself along the coasts of Spain.

The people have changed very little in themselves since Lever wrote of them: where food has always been too scarce, as at the extremity of the Mullet peninsula curving about Blacksod Bay, famine and famine fever have weakened the stock terribly, and in such places you can see that looped and windowed raggedness and that squalor of hovels which go to make up the Englishman's conception of the sister island. But you can see also in markets in north Mayo many a handsome old man, springy and active even in his extreme age, who wears the blue tail coat, with its complement of brass buttons, which perhaps his father handed down to him—and a fine figure he makes in it, especially if he still keeps to the tight knee breeches and buckled shoes which were universal in his boyhood.

Here and there, too, the ancient beaver hat with its long nap still lingers: such things must be almost indestructible. A few years ago the beautiful ruin of Ross Errilly Abbey near Headford was guarded by an old peasant in this headgear; corduroy breeches and gaiters completed the picture. But on the whole, Connaught—more's the pity—is trouser-wearing like the rest of Europe: yet for all that the Connaught-man remains distinctive.

Smooth-tongued you will find them: supple you may think them: but the fire which kindles in Connaught is no flicker. Michael Davitt was born in a Mayo peasant's cabin, his earliest memory the eviction which drove him and his adrift on the world. He died in early middle age, yet before he died, what he himself called the Fall of Feudalism was accomplished: he himself, more than any other man, had destroyed the old order under which such eviction was the universal terror hanging over every peasant's head. Lord MacDonnell of Swinford was a poor man's son in Connaught, his parents hardly rich enough to equip him for the priesthood. He got an even cheaper education at the Queen's College in Galway, won his place in the Indian Civil Service, and there proved himself a governor as imperious and as capable and as beneficent as India had known since the Lawrences. It is a poor province, but it breeds notable men. I sat at dinner not long ago with three who had been at school together in the west, poor lads all of them. One had become bishop of his diocese; one was the best-known journalist in England and no mean force in politics; the third, perhaps, the greatest orator in America, something of a party to himself—but beyond all doubt a power.



LOWLANDS, BALLINLOUGH, ROSCOMMON

It is perhaps well to remember such facts in visiting a country where poverty stares you in the face, where, at least in certain parts, it has become a disease. Courtesy in the poor is apt to seem obsequious; yet courtesy is of all things most native to Connaught, and it is finest shown where the folk have acquired some stable security. I fished one afternoon with an old man in a lake in the mountains behind Leenane, a poor man but evidently not needy; he and his wife pressed on us the best they had to give, and because our fishing had been unsuccessful, wanted to refuse all payment. What we paid was little enough for those hours of easy paddling in the sunshine amid noble hills, and for the pleasure of that old boatman's wise, shrewd, and witty company.

That lake—Lough na Foey—lies midway, beautiful itself but unutterably wild, between the two most beautiful centres in Connaught: between Killary Bay and the upper end of Lough Corrib. With Lough na Foey for centre, a radius of twenty miles would take in all or almost all the scenic beauty of County Galway—and a good deal of what is finest in Mayo. North of that again is fine scenery about Westport: then comes the superb cliff-front of Achill: then after a long interval, you come again to Sligo with yet another noble grouping of mountain, lake, river, and sea.

In the other two of Connaught's five counties—Roscommon and Leitrim—there is very little to tempt the tourist; though a great deal of interest for the student in Irish history, whether of to-day or the remotest past. Croghan, Cruachan, was the seat of Connaught's kingdom when Emain Macha at Armagh made a fortress for the Red Branch chivalry. It was from Cruachan that Maeve and her army set out to win the Brown Bull of Cooley to enrich the Connaught herds; and to-day no part of Ireland has greater store of fine cattle, fine sheep, and fine horses than Roscommon's fertile plains. Nor is there anywhere better to see that work of resettling on the good land (left for decades in mere prairie) those people whose fathers were huddled too thick on the bogs and moors where grass would not grow. Roscommon contributes more than its share—though five counties take a part—to what is still the great event of the year in Connaught, the fair of Ballinasloe, lasting through the first week in October. To that wonderful muster comes the pick of all the sheep and cattle, and above all, of the horses from western and central Ireland. The sheep fair, held in Lord Clancarty's demesne, covers a huge space of the park—Galway, Roscommon, and Tipperary each having its allotted quarter: but unless you rise early, all you will see is trampled ground, over which hangs the greasy smell of wool, and only some few scores of the twenty thousand animals that were gathered there, by pen and pen, in the grey dawn, bleating and huddling together. But any day and all day in the week, on the broad fair green outside the town you may see the best of Ireland's horses being galloped and trotted and shown off and examined—for the benefit of buyers from over all Europe. You may hear German, Italian, French, Spanish, all, or any of them spoken on that astonishing mart; and you may observe the likeness in diversity which stamps itself upon horsey men, whatever their nationality.

Except on a fair day, Ballinasloe has no special interest or beauty, but five miles west of it lies the field of Aughrim, where was fought the greatest though not the most decisive battle of the Williamite wars. It is easy to trace the lie of the fight, along the range of hillocks by Aughrim where St. Ruth, James's general, took up position, facing the bog which divided him from Urrachree, to which Ginkel had moved out from Ballinasloe. Till quite lately a thorn-tree marked the spot where St. Ruth lay, struck down by a cannon shot as he headed what should have been the decisive charge. One can guess, too, at the position behind the ridges, where the Frenchman's jealousy kept Ireland's own leader, Sarsfield, out of action with the reserves, chafing for action, till St. Ruth's fall disorganized everything, and the call for Sarsfield came too late. In the north of Ireland they still perform a play representing this great encounter, and every Orangeman is more anxious to be Sarsfield than any hero on the Orange side.

But no one goes to Aughrim in search of beauty (in truth no one goes there at all, which is a strange effect of indifference to history), and on the main Connaught line you do not reach fine scenery till at Oranmore an old castle rises by the inner shallow waters of Galway Bay, here strewn with numberless little reefs and islets.—Salute the best stretch of oyster-breeding water which these counties know: Galway Bay oysters, from Red Bank on the Clare side, to Ardfry where the Department of Agriculture controls a spawning ground a few miles from Galway itself, are not only the best in flavour but the freest from any suspicion of pollution of all oysters in the world, and in Galway at the proper season they should always be demanded by every visitor while it is still time: for the English market will almost certainly engross them, when it becomes really aware of their existence. Ten years ago as you travelled in summer round the coast of Galway or Mayo, the hotels were not splendid, their menu was rudimentary, but always there was a dish of lobsters big and little piled up in careless profusion; you ate one or two or three as the fancy took

you. Now, you hardly buy a lobster along that coast; a company has contracted for the whole take, fishermen bring them in their currachs to a depot where they are put into anchored crates, until the steamer comes up to collect and direct them into that vast maw which has its tentacles exploring the very shores of Iceland and Russia for daily supply.

Still, when you get to Connemara or Mayo, you will not grudge these folk the access to a market which makes lobster fishing almost the most profitable of their industries. Along Galway Bay you look out over one of the most beautiful scenes in Ireland, and the most barren. Across, opposite you, is the mountainous shore of Clare, where, in the limestone district called Burren, Ireton (down there on some errand of mercy) reported that there was not water enough to drown a man, soil enough to bury him, nor wood enough to hang him. Off the mouth of the bay, making a natural breakwater for its superb natural harbour, lie the three islands of Aran which are, like Burren, built up of flat limestone slabs—in whose crevices there grows herbage, sweet and nourishing for cattle; but how human beings, let alone cows, travel those rocks without breaking a leg a week in the fissures passes all comprehension.

Rocky though the soil, these waters are not barren, and Aran lives by its nets, and lives much better than it did in the old days before the Congested Districts Board set up the folk with strong boats and good gear, and established a steamer to bring them in touch with the market. Yet Synge's wonderful and terrible little drama, *Riders to the Sea*, tells the true story of their life, shows how encompassed it is at any moment by the deadliest peril; for the waves on that western coast have been seen to break where there was nearly a hundred feet in depth of water, so vast, so tremendous are the movements of storm where the Atlantic swings in its full force upon the first bulwark it meets—a bulwark planted in the deep, and dreadfully sudden therefore in its check to the whole power of ocean.



MWHEELREA AND THE KILLARY, FROM TULLY STRAND, RENVYLE

That is what gives a special character to all the scenery of western Ireland. It is not only sea you are looking at, it is ocean: ocean in its full depth within a few miles of the shore, and the blueness of deep water is a very different thing from the blue of the Irish Channel or the English, to say nothing of the yellowish waters of the North Sea. And the wash of waves there, even on a calm day, has in it a slow, heavy rhythm, a sense of power which rocks and soothes the senses. But to face that sea on that coast, not only rockbound but flanked with a line of reefs and islands, in hooker or pookaun or canvas-covered currach, is an enterprise that might well dismay. Yet, oddly enough, these men whose daily life is one long risk of drowning, who endanger themselves times innumerable in the mere act of entering or leaving a currach when a sea runs, are more frightened than women by the unknown adventure of sailing in a strong vessel clear away to sea, and when they first lose sight of land and see only water round them, they will lie down and give themselves over for lost.

All the north shore of Galway Bay is long, low, and indented with a hundred creeks and bays. It is the paradise of fishermen, full of small lakes connected by little rivers up which the white trout run as nowhere else, and on a good day you may kill three or four dozen—but such fishings are of course not for the chance comer. The most famous and beautiful of these lake and river systems is that of Ballynahinch, once the home of the Martins—types of all that was kindest, oddest, wildest, and most feudal in the old feudal days. Miss Edgeworth came there on a journey in the early days of last century, while roads as yet were little more than a name, and the illness of a travelling companion detained her party as guests for a stay that ran into weeks: lucky chance, to which we owe a picture, such as she only could sketch, of that primitive family hospitality, its table loaded with delicacies of the wilds, salmon, venison, oysters, and the rest, presided over by a host used to administer patriarchal justice among the clansmen, sometimes by form of law, sometimes by the strong fist. The hostess was a lady of the old school; but strangest and most picturesque of all, was their one child, a daughter, the lovely "Princess of Connemara", creature of the mountains no less than any Flora MacIvor with her train of ragged gillies—yet instructed not only in the modern tongues but also in the ancient classics. She read the Greek poets, back there among her ragged mountain peaks: she spoke fluently a French which savoured oddly of the camp, for her teacher was a waif from Napoleon's armies, and this young chieftainess had the French Revolution in her heart.—God be with the old days, now passed clean out of sight, if not out of mind. When the Martin estate went down in the ruin that involved so many of the landed gentry sixty years ago, it at least perished nobly; for the Martin of that day beggared himself in the effort to feed the population that was starving by thousands in the great famine. Old folk remember still the *droch-aimsir*, the bad times, all over Ireland: yet in the nakedness of Connemara I have not heard any such awful tales as come down by word of mouth

and written record relating to places far less out of reach of help.

The Martins are gone from Ballynahinch and a newcomer has their home, and for the moment something of their lordship, though here the Congested Districts Board is at last seriously at work, striving to settle the people not only on holdings of their own, but on holdings which may support them. But the beauty of that region is unchanged: the mountain group which we call the Twelve Pins rises in peaks from out of moor and lake and river: the marble which it holds glistens in rain and sun: and whether you see it from the south by the shore of Galway Bay, from Camus water near Rosmuck, or beside the broader water of Kilkerrin, or from the west where Ballinakill Bay runs up in creeks and windings towards the pretty village of Letterfrack,—wherever you take your view point, no mountain group in all Ireland can quite compare with it for grace and for perfection of line.

At Recess, near Ballynahinch, where is the railway hotel, one is too close under the heights, too shut in; to see the Connemara Mountains rightly, they should be seen from the shore of the sea. Clifden, where the railway has its terminus, is a little too far off; and upon the whole my choice would be for Letterfrack (*Leitir-bhreach*, the speckled meadow) on the shore of Ballinakill, where a delightful river has its outfall. Yet perhaps one who cared less for the running water and its chance of fish would like that country best of all from Renvyle, where an old country house is kept open as a hotel—facing the Atlantic, and commanding full view not of the Twelve Pins only but of the mountains which lie about Killary harbour and beyond.

Killary is the deep narrow cleft which strikes far in past the base of Mweelrea, the highest mountain in all Connaught, and runs up to where the flank of the Devil's Mother divides the village of Leenane from the outflow of the Erriff river, plunging over the fall at Aasleigh. I recite a litany of names well known to every angler in the west—and to more than anglers, for the hotel at Leenane is a halting place on the coachroad which follows the coast from Clifden to Westport; and no sea lough in all Ireland is more beautiful than Killary on its own day.

Leenane is on the boundary of the two counties, Galway and Mayo (which latter name is properly pronounced with the accent on the *o*). From the hamlet a steep road runs back climbing the skirts of the Devil's Mother—where eagles build—and then plunges down the pass which leads to Maam at the upper end of Lough Corrib, and so to the isthmus of Cong, under which water makes a subterranean pathway for the eels of Lough Mask into Corrib, whence they go by the weir at Galway (where eel traps take toll of them) to their spawning grounds in the deepest sea.

This road is one of the boundaries about the region of the Twelve Pins, through which wild sanctuary no made track for wheels has been driven. You have the Pins (or "Bens" rather) on the south as you go from Leenane to Maam; on the west as you go from Maam to Maam Cross; on the north from Maam Cross to Recess, and on the east as you take the beautiful road from Recess by Lough Inagh, and so through the defile at Kylemore, where the great house stands with long terrace facing on to the exquisite lower lake, approached by a roadway along which are mile-long hedges of crimson fuchsia. Kylemore means the Big Wood, and the name is natural enough, for here only in Connemara is there any considerable growth of trees; the country is too bare and wild for them. At Carna, on the shore of Galway Bay, can be seen the lamentable remains of an experimental plantation, replaced now by a new and much more successful planting of the New Zealand flax, which with its yucca-like fronds grows very freely on the west, and gives some hope of a new industry.

But beyond Maam, on the shores of Corrib, is wooding and to spare; none denser, more undisturbed. About Cong are the famous woodcock covers where Lord Ardilaun's guests have killed five hundred birds in a day. Almost every island on the lake (and there is said to be an island for every day in the year) is set thick with leafage, and there are those who claim that Corrib where it broadens out between Cong and Oughterard is a rival to Killarney. I do not seek to decide such a contention; but the place is far richer in antiquarian interest than Killarney, and infinitely less tourist-ridden.



A FISHERMAN'S HOME UNDER DIAMOND MOUNTAIN, BALLYNAKILL BAY

It is no business of mine here to write about hotels; but still one wishes to show what is practicable for those who may care to explore this great line of western lakes. By far the easiest way to go is by the little steamer from Galway to Cong—a run of some thirty miles, done very leisurely. There is a comfortable inn at Cong: a larger one three or four miles off at Clonbur; at Ballinrobe, I suppose, quarters can be had, and certainly in Tourmakeady on the west

shore of Mask. If, however, you have followed the line from Recess to Letterfrack, and so to Leenane, then there is an admirable possibility for varying the journey. Take the road from Leenane to Maam. Halfway down it, near Kilmilkin, another road turns off steeply to the left so that you still contrive to skirt the Devil's Mother; and after a mile or two through bog, it goes corkscrewing down a woeful hill, and you are in the basin of Lough na Fooley, high among the hills of Joyce Country. Beyond the lake the road climbs again to emerge from that basin, and you pelt away down the long slope of Maamtrasna, the valley at the head of upper Lough Mask. Savage memories dwell there; memories of killings between peasants in the land war of the 'eighties, memories of high diplomatic slaughter when the heir to the earldom of Ulster was done away with in Illaun an Iarla, a little island which your driver will show you. The Stauntons who carried out that killing kept a bad name from it through centuries of Irish tradition.

Striking in, then, behind Kilbreedy Mountain, which sunders upper Lough Mask from the main water, you soon come out on the shore of the lake, and I wish you the luck to see two as pretty girls as met me just where the counties join at the little Owenbrin river. A few miles of tolerable road will bring you to the prosperous-looking little village of Tourmakeady, where is a hotel. Here is fishing to be had for pike and for big trout, and here much that is pleasant and profitable can be studied. At the Franciscan monastery, a civil-spoken stranger will always find a welcome, and, at least while Brother Leo is still living, one of the best of talkers to instruct him in the history of all that countryside. These monks have largely helped on the work of the Congested Districts Board in teaching improved methods of farming, and the like: they have been what monastic centres were often in old days. Close by is another factor in the modern development of Ireland, the Connaught college for study of the Irish language, here where it is living on the lips of young and old. In summer you shall find from eighty to a hundred students working there, with classes held largely in the open air: but all centring about a farmhouse converted to these unforeseen uses. Most of the students will be school teachers, desirous to advance themselves in a subject for which there is a swiftly growing demand; but you will almost to a certainty find a sprinkling there who have come, it may be, from France, from Hungary, from the Western States of America, from heaven knows where, to pursue this long-neglected but now eagerly followed branch of learning. And you may hear, and perhaps see, how with the study pleasant festivities interweave themselves of an evening, dances, jigs, reels, hornpipes, and the rest—or simply the *céilidhe*, a gathering for talk and story-telling round the fire.

From Tourmakeady, I would have you proceed by boat, crossing the lake to Ballinrobe, and seeing on your way *Caisleán na Caillidhe*, Hag's Castle, a very early example of the fortifications which Irish chiefs began to build when they had learnt from the Normans how much stronger were stone walls than earthen ramparts. Yet here the stone wall is on the model of an earthen dun, built circular, and of no great height—an enclosure for defence rather than a dwelling place—doubly defended too, for it stands on an island near to the Ballinrobe shore.

As you drive from Ballinrobe to Cong, you shall see on your left a huge cairn of stones crowning a low height. This is an outlying monument of that famous battle of Moytura, fought, it is said, between the legendary Tuatha de Danann, warrior demigods, against those older inhabitants of Ireland, Firbolgs, men of the leathern wallet. Who fought that fight, when they fought it, is obscure, but fought it was, and the cairns rise thick over the battlefield, a couple of miles behind Cong. All this lore was studied out and set down by the notable father of a still more celebrated son. Oscar Wilde must have spent no small part of his boyhood at Moytura House where his father, Sir William Wilde, passed what holidays a great surgeon could secure, and where he wrote his *Antiquities of Lough Corrib*.

There is another legendary battlefield in Sligo called the northern Moytura, which tradition identifies with the site of a second and final battle in which the De Danann defeated the men of the wallet, and it is marked by the same profusion of cairns and stone circles—which, it must be allowed, can be constructed with less labour in the west of Ireland than elsewhere, because the whole surface of the ground is covered with the material for them. Yet assuredly some great event must be marked by monuments so laborious: though I find their associations a trifle too shadowy for interest.

The great cairn on the road to Ballinrobe is said to be that of King Eochy, the Firbolg leader, who was slain on the last day of the fight. But near it stands a modern landmark of undisputable authenticity. Lough Mask House was in the early 'eighties the residence of Captain Boycott, against whom was first organized the "boycott" which proved to be the peasantry's most effective weapon in the revolution which has been in progress for the past thirty years. All this countryside is peaceable enough nowadays, but there was wild work there before compulsory rent fixing, followed by voluntary purchase, began to settle the land war.

In Cong itself is a wealth of things to be seen: first of all, the demesne, planted by one of the Guinness family, who showed his fine understanding of trees in the disposal of that varied wooding: and leave can be had also to visit the gardens whose owner, Lady Ardilaun, is famous among Irish lovers of flowers. But apart from this, there is the strange river which past Cong flows crystal clear over a limestone bed, and about half a mile off issues from its underground journey out of Lough Mask in a strange cavern called the Pigeon Hole. Near by is costly and deplorable evidence of the queer tendency to fissure in this limestone formation: for sometime in the last century a canal was dug laboriously to connect Mask and Corrib, and so open traffic by boat and barge to Tourmakeady and Ballinrobe from the sea. But when the long digging and hewing was finished, they let the water in, and it promptly leaked away through a hundred clefts and crannies—making, no doubt, wonderful and mysterious noises. All through East Galway (for west of Corrib the stone is mostly granite) there are rivers that appear and disappear in this strange fashion, running now overground, now under; and where the stream sinks out of sight can often be heard queer rhythmic throbbings and beatings, in which the sound of a fairy mill is easily detected; and about these popular imagination quickly builds legends, telling how in old days corn would be laid there and in the morning its owner would come back to find it ready ground, till at last some covetous man failed to leave the unseen miller his due portion, and so no more corn was miraculously ground for deceitful mortals.

These are the marvels of nature. But by the river of Cong, which divides Mayo from Galway, stands one of the most

beautiful ruins in the west—all that is left of what was once St. Fechin's monastery. But St. Fechin belongs to the old days of the seventh century, long before any builder in these islands had the skill to construct that graceful cloister. The abbey which we know is pre-Norman, an Augustinian foundation, and it has a special interest, for to its repose came Rory O'Connor, last of the native kings to claim sovereignty over all Ireland. Already he had been sorely driven and harried by the Norman invaders, before he retired here in 1183 to spend yet fifteen years more of his life. It was doubtless he who made it into the gem of the western dioceses; and in all the changes and chances of the centuries there still was an abbot of Cong till a date hardly outside living memory. In Cong, too, was treasured—or rather was heedlessly kept—the most famous of all the jewels which descend from the ancient craftsmanship of Ireland. The cross of Cong, a reliquary, made to be borne in procession, enclosing a fragment of the true cross, stands two feet and a half in height and is covered with gold tracery of the most incredible complexity and fineness. What the artist could do with his fine pointed brush in the Book of Kells, this artificer could almost rival in his twisting of the delicate wire. The thing is priceless and was bought (in a transaction of doubtful morality) for the Royal Irish Academy through Wilde's agency. But in truth the National Museum in Kildare Street where it reposes is the proper place for it: though one cannot but feel sympathy for the zealous young priest who made his way from Cong to Dublin, boldly smashed the case and rushed into the street with the reliquary, prepared at all hazards to bring it back to the home which it had known for seven centuries.



ON THE OWENBRIN RIVER, LOUGH MASK

A stone now set up in the street at Cong commemorates in a Gaelic inscription two Abbots of Cong, Nicol and Gillibard O'Duffy, and I hope that one of them may be the O'Duffy to whose order the cross was made—not in Cong, but in the other abbey of Roscommon, by the cunning craftsman whose name is inscribed on its arms: MAELISU MACBRADDAIN O-H-ECHAN.

An inscription of even greater interest can be seen in a setting of the most fascinating beauty. Sail or row across from Cong (you can fish as you go, and I caught a trout seventeen pounds weight on my first venture in that water—why should not you be as lucky?) to Inchoigoill Island, and you will see one of the oldest churches in Ireland, called *Teampul Phadraig*—Patrick's Church. Its walls are of stone, very roughly put together; its doorway of the oldest type—two sides sloping towards the top, which is covered by a huge lintel slab. All this can be matched elsewhere, but the special interest is a stone graven in the oldest Celtic characters with these letters: LIE LUGNEEDON MACC LMENVEH: that is, The slab of Lugneedon, son of Lemenuh. Now Lugneedon was Patrick's nephew and his pilot; and this inscription may be contemporary—or may have been erected less early than the sixth century, but yet so early that the tradition was still alive of him who had died there. For the island's full name is *Inis an Ghoill Chraoibthigh*, the island of the Devout Stranger, and certainly keeps a memory of someone who, coming from far away, identified himself with it either by his life or by his death.

It is set in the most beautiful portion of the lake, midway from Cong to Oughterard, and you can see thence Benlevi steep over the isthmus of Cong, and Leckavrea with its grey, slaty cliff frowning over the upper end of Corrib between Oughterard and Maam.

In this sheet of water, which (by a sudden winding between clifty wooded sides where the lake narrows at Doon) is so shut off as to seem a lake by itself, stands not far from the western end, *Caislean na Circe*, Hen's Castle. And popular imagination, stimulated by the name, has invented the story of a miraculous hen which was guaranteed to lay enough eggs to keep the garrison alive; but they tired of eggs, killed the bird, and so came by disaster. The truth, however, I believe to be that this castle, which was built for Rory O'Connor by one of the great De Burgos who made their way to Connaught, fell later into the de Burgos' (or Burkes') possession; and the Hen who gave her name to it was Grace O'Malley, Granuaile; for she proved herself the better bird when her second husband, the Burke who then owned it, was in danger of being forced to submit, till the doughty warriorress relieved him.

All these things you can see from Cong by easy pleasant excursions, to be combined if you so choose with fishing in waters where trout if caught are worth the catching; and when you have had your fill of Cong, the steamer will take you to Galway, down that long narrow lake with rick-shaped Benlevi steep above Cong and Leckavrea making a cliff on the southwest. To the east all is flat plain, the long level tract of limestone which stretches out to the Shannon, and which on this side of Tuam is for the most part stone and nothing else. Only one height rises on that hand—your

left as you travel to Galway; it is the conical hill of Knockmagh, the greatest mount of fairies in all Ireland; crowned with a cairn, of course—Carn Ceasair—under which sleeps, they say, Ceasair, chieftainess of the first invasion that came to Ireland, just forty days before the Flood. There are lesser cairns on its sides, in which recent exploration has discovered funeral cists, flag covered, holding in them bones and even an urn of "bodkin-pencilled" clay.

Anyone who cares to see what is not in the common run of tourist visitation should make his way from Cong to Tuam, by Headford, where is the splendid ruin of Ross Errilly, a famous monastery of the Franciscans, standing almost intact, though unroofed, and stripped of its ornamentation by the Cromwellian soldiers. The friars clung to this abode till 1753, though six several times expelled, returning under the protection of Lord Clanricarde; since in those days Clanricarde, head of the Burkes in Connaught, was a name of shelter for the native Irish, among whom his de Burgo stock had been so long and so fully naturalized. The famous rallying song of 1848, "The West Awake", tells how "Glory guards Clanricarde's grave", and in truth, with scarcely an exception, not a Clanricarde of them all but was loved by the people. And if the name that was once so kindly, bears a very different sound to-day, Connaught has its own way of accounting for the change.

It is worth climbing Knockmagh to see across that spreading plain, crossed and chequered with the stone walls which endear Galway to all who like big jumping in the foxhunt: for the mountains of Connemara show westward but Croaghpatrick and Nephin away north. Under Knockmagh beside the road is the church of Donagh Patrick, marking the western point of St. Patrick's missionary journey here. But his favourite disciple Benen, or Benignus, had a monastery near Tuam at Kilbannon, where stands the stump of a round tower, and pushed his journeyings even to Aran where monuments bear his name.

Tuam itself is well worth a visit for things old and things new—or shall I say the survival of the remote and the recent past. Its long street of thatched houses, its marketplace crowded with Irish-speaking men and women all in characteristic western dress, make it more typically Irish than any town in Connaught except only Galway—and Galway is a thing apart. The modern cathedral, too, is of interest for the sake of sculptured heads wrought by a local craftsman who was a kind of Cruickshank in stone—preserving in his craft a glorious tradition of the place. For the great sculptured arch which can be seen in the ancient cathedral, restored more than a quarter of a century ago for Protestant worship, is the finest example of native Irish decorative architecture, before Continental influences came in. It is the Romanesque half-circle, with six concentric orders of arches included in the great span. The red sandstone of which it is wrought lent itself freely to carving, and the unknown and unnamed workers bestowed a wealth of detail upon it, blending, after the Celtic fashion, shapes of man, bird, and beast, into the interlaced scroll of the design.

The rest of the building must have been worthy of this glorious centre: but, in years of desolation, plunder was made of carved stones for common building work, and the tall cross which stands now, imperfectly put together, in the marketplace, was rescued by sections from various houses and buildings. Eight stones went to complete it and only five are there: it is a pity that their places are not filled in with uncarved slabs, for the proportion of the monument is destroyed.

If you drive or motor from Tuam to Galway it is easy to visit another famous ruin, the Abbey Knockmoy erected for the Cistercians by Cathal O'Connor of the Red Hand, as a thankoffering for his victory over the first Norman party of invaders whom, with their leader, Almeric St. Laurence, he destroyed near the abbey's site. There is a trace of frescoes discernible on the chancel walls; and it is easy enough to see how the original and most beautiful twelfth-century building was, so to say, cut down and curtailed for a reduced community of monks who may have been there in some interval between persecution and persecution.



CASTLE KIRKE AND UPPER LOUGH CORRIB

In the graveyard here you can see what is common in all Connaught up to the present day—tombstones carved with the insignia of the dead man's trade, the carpenter's plane and saw, the smith's hammer, and so forth.

Apart from this the road is over flat land, little raised above the level of Lough Corrib, till you near Galway, when it rises over low hills of limestone rock, in springtime blue with gentian, at all times singular enough with their flooring of stone. At the last rise you reach a view point, looking west from which the city comes suddenly into sight with its bay beyond, and beyond the bay the hills of Burren. It tells something of what Galway was that the name of this spot

is *Bois le h-eadan*, "Hand to Brow", for here it was supposed that you would stop and shade your eyes to consider the glory that lay before you.

Little enough glory is there to-day; but the city keeps a picturesqueness at this distance, couching there at the outflow of the vast sheet of water which is comprised in Corrib and Mask; and that blue expanse of bay reaching up into the level land—brown rather than green, since bog and stone and scrub cover most of it—has a beauty all its own; and southward the eye follows with delight the open gap between the hills of Burren by the western sea, and that other line, Slieve Echtge, which divides the plain of Gort from the Shannon. Here was the boundary and pass between Connaught and Munster, the country of the O'Kellys, Hy Many; and no place in Ireland was so often fought over. As you go south from Athenry to Ennis, the whole landscape is studded with old castles and peel-towers, set for the most part in pairs, every one watching his neighbour, like players lined up at football.

Galway town, once you have entered it, is depressing beyond words, but also more picturesque than any town in Ireland. A hundred years ago it was the greatest port of the country, in its own way a rival to Bristol and Liverpool. Those were the days of small towns, and Galway numbered forty thousand people. To-day the population is barely fourteen thousand—but it is not the drop in numbers that signifies most. Go about the streets and you will find tall, solid buildings of black stone built very high, for the town was walled and space was scarce in it. Some of these were dwelling-houses, and over their doorways are the great scutcheons carved in stone belonging to this or that one of the thirteen "tribes"—Blakes, Lynches, Bodkins, Brownes, Skerrets, Kirwans, Morrisies, Ffrenches, Martins, and the rest—names which to-day sound Irish of the Irish, yet which in truth belonged to English settlers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries who established here a flourishing merchant community. In those early days the great trade was with Spain; for a glance at the map will show how short a run it is from the west of Ireland to that other western outpost of Europe—a run which can be made either way with the prevailing westerly wind. "Spanish Parade" keeps its memorial of that traffic, but more clearly is it preserved by a famous story. In the wall which surrounds the old Church of St. Nicholas is a stone engraven with skull and crossbones, and a recent inscription commemorating the austere virtue of James Lynch Fitzstephen, Mayor of Galway in 1493. The Mayor was a merchant in close commerce with Spain, and on one of his journeys he brought back with him a young Spaniard, son of his host and friend. But at home in Galway, quarrel broke out (it is said, over a lady) between Lynch's own son and his guest, and the Galway man stabbed the Spaniard. For his offence he was arraigned, and his father passed sentence of death; but a compassionate horror seized the townspeople, and none would execute the sentence. So, that justice might be done, the laws of hospitality asserted—and perhaps, too, lest there should be a break in the friendly relations with Spain—Lynch Fitzstephen hanged his son with his own hand.

In the church, a fine building of the fourteenth century, are many monuments of the "tribes"—but of more interest are the mansions: chief of them the "Lynch House", standing in the main street and richly decorated with stone mouldings. Nearer the port are huge buildings of more recent date, grain-stores erected in the early eighteenth century when a tremendous export trade to England ran from this port. All of them, or all but all, mansions and stores alike, have fallen on evil days, and you shall see the decorated scutcheon over the entrance to some rookery of wretched tenements.



IN THE PASS OF DELPHI, KILLARY BAY

The port is hardly less depressing. Admirable as a shelter in the days of small vessels, it is unfit for these days when even coasting traffic comes in ships of three thousand tons. It is true they have a dock hollowed out of rock and holding eighteen foot of water; but the Board of Works (a department of Dublin Castle) which executed the work at a cost of forty thousand pounds omitted to notice that there was only twelve foot of water at the entrance: and the accommodation is thought as useful as a second storey with no stair to it. Nearly all the shipping consists in fishing boats: many trawlers, but most numerous of all, the little hookers worked by the fishermen who live across the river in the very odd community called the Claddagh. These people till recently had a "king" of their own (just as happens on the small islands of the coast) and they lived their own life, and indeed still live it, almost wholly distinct from the regular townfolk. Their thatched cottages scattered in a huddled group without streets or plan of any kind make a curious feature of the place; but it is a curiosity rather than a charm.

In the main street of the town lives a jeweller who manufactures still the Claddagh ring which these folk and the

Aran people use for marriage or betrothal: joined hands surmounted by a crowned heart make an emblem which needs no posy to expound it. You can get in Galway also another local object which is worth having, the woman's strong cloak of red or blue flannel with hood to shelter the head in the stormiest of weather.

Perhaps one of the most interesting sights in the place—at least to the angler—is to be seen from the bridge which spans the main river below the broad weir which holds up water for the sluices and mill powers. Here is a long, swift shallow which in summer becomes crowded with salmon to a degree almost incredible; the fish lie under you there, some twenty feet from your eyes, their sides touching as the dark backs sway in the water, so that at the first glimpse one seems to look into a mass of weed. Anglers can be seen fishing there close together, and many hundreds of fish are killed yearly from the bank. It was here that one enthusiast achieved a fisherman's euthanasia, for he dropped dead suddenly in the very act of playing a fish. The papers gave long accounts of the sad event, recalling the dead man's achievements and qualities as sportsman and citizen; then added a final paragraph—

"Our readers will be glad to learn that the rod which Mr. —— dropped was immediately taken up by our esteemed townsman Mr. —— who found the fish still on, and after ten minutes' play, succeeded in landing it—a fine clean-run salmon of fifteen pounds."

What more was needed for epitaph? The soul of "Mr. ——" had departed under the most satisfactory auspices.

Whoever is at Galway and does not shrink from a three hours' sail should really make the voyage to Aran: a little steamer in these bustling times plies in and out twice or thrice weekly. In the sail down the bay you have the long low shore of Connemara on your right with the Twelve Pins rising in superbly grouped mass behind it: on your left, the steep shore of Burren, its rocks shining in the sun, and as you open out, the cliffs of Moher dark and frowning away south of you. Between you and America lie the islands—three of them, Inishmore, Inishmaan, and Inishere—stretching a vast breakwater against gales from the west and sou'west. Inishmore, the Big Island, lies nearest, and when you are landed at Kilronan, the adjacent fields and hill slopes are not much stonier than Connemara. But on Inishmaan you land direct on to a formation of vast, flat flagstones, stepped upwards tier by tier, and you walk as if on pavement, though a pavement filled with deep chinks and crevices in which grow quantities of maidenhair fern. You have easy walking, perhaps, for ten yards together, then a kind of a leap. Here, still, most of the people wear not boots but pampooties—moccasins of raw hide: and men and women alike have the free forward rising gait of those who walk as nature designed man to walk, springing off the ball of the toe. Nearly all are in homespun homewoven cloth, grey or dyed with indigo and madder: the women wear grey shawls, the men frequently a tam-o'-shanter, but oftener the black corded *caubeen* which is the most picturesque of headgear. Inishmaan is the place to see Aran in its most characteristic aspect and community, hardly touched by the modern world—though many a man and woman there knows well the great cities of eastern America. I heard of a man who made his journey across every autumn: he had been gardener to a rich American, and the millionaire would let no other prune his grapes but this handy islander. So back and forward he went, year by year, on this errand, returning always to his own cabin, his shelter under the thatch which strong lashings held in place against the storm.

But the extraordinary interest of these islands lies in the abundance of prehistoric forts and of very early Christian buildings. The greatest of the forts is Dun Conor on Inishmaan, with walls of dry masonry eighteen feet in thickness; but by far the most famous is Dun Angus on Inishmore which, built on the edge of a steep cliff, needed no protection that way, but turned landward a semicircular front of four vast ring fences of stone—the innermost eighteen feet in height. Between the second and third walls is a chevaux de frise formed by sharp, jagged stones set endwise, very difficult to pass over in times of peace. We have it under Dr. Healy's own hand that an archbishop broke his shins there. This fort might have seemed defence enough for the island, but it is studded over with duns—one of them, Dun Eochail, is only half an hour's walk from the pier, and being set high was once utilized for a lighthouse station. To reach it gives one some idea of the island economy, for half a dozen high-piled walls of loose stone have to be crossed or knocked down. There are no gates in these fields; to let in a cow you "knock" the wall, and then pile it again. But you will not easily knock the walls of Dun Eochail. The outer ring is only some eight foot high and six wide, but the inner circle rises sixteen foot, and may be twelve in thickness. Who built these fortresses, no man can say; probably that early race whom the Milesians superseded. Yet the population of Aran is by no means the little dark type; many fair-haired women, many a red-headed man are among them, and not a few of almost giant stature. It is not surprising, since for many centuries the O'Briens of Clare were overlords of the islands, and the Clan Dalcais were Milesian, if any ever could claim that title.

Generally speaking, too, Aran is more in touch with Clare than with Connemara; though it serves as an intermediate centre for the traffic in poteen—illicit whisky—distilled in creeks and bogs along Galway Bay. Aran brings its turf from Connemara and carries them limestone in exchange. Stand on Dun Eochail, the most commanding point, and you may see the two shores, Clare and Connemara, so near, yet so different in their peoples, and you shall have one of the noblest views in Ireland: southward, away past Loophead and the Shannon mouth to the great mountain promontory of Brandon in Kerry; northward, past the Twelve Pins to Mweelrea and Croaghpatrick and Achill even. Or if, as happened when I saw it last, the view is obscured with driving mist, still you may have a glint of sun between showers to fling a rainbow across the wide water; and you may watch a squall of wind and rain pass flickering over the sound, raising a patch of whitening foam where its fierce edge strikes the surface.

It is likely that the nearness of warrior tribes in Clare may account for the number and the strength of these stone fortresses; the island folk, Firbolgs or whoever they were, would not have so ensconced themselves without grim necessity for the labour. Yet all this is conjectural. What lies well within the bounds of historic knowledge is the Christian history of Aran—*Ara na naomh*, Aran of the Saints, not rashly so entitled.

Enda, the first founder of the famous monastic settlement, was a king's son when St. Patrick came to Ireland. His father ruled the kingdom of Oriel, the southern tract of Ulster, reaching across Cavan and Monaghan. Enda's sister

took the veil from the hands of Patrick, and she it was, according to legend, who turned her brother from his career as a prince and a warrior. He underwent long training in Louth and over the seas in Britain before he returned to Oriel; but there he found no peace. He wanted solitude, and he begged the islands of Aran from the King of Munster. And, if tradition be accurate, he made his way to them miraculously wafted on a great boat-shaped stone which lies till this day on the shore at Killeany, *Cill Eadna*, Enda's Church.



WRACK-GATHERING ON THE WEST COAST

The fame of his settlement spread rapidly, for the missionary period was now being succeeded by an enthusiasm for the contemplative life; and all the great saints of the sixth century came to Aran and were his disciples. St. Brendan the Navigator came there, already prospecting his journey to the unknown land of the west; Columbkille, prince of Tirconnell, the apostle of Scotland, came thither, subduing his proud and fierce temper; and there, too, was nurtured Ciaran, the founder of Clonmacnoise, best loved of Irish saints. All these men were not only centres of piety, but lamps and torches of learning in a dark age: only scholars can estimate what it meant to civilization that this home of studious thought should be maintained outside the weltering chaos of Rome's disruption when sheer barbarism threatened to engulf the world.

There are many ancient churches on Aran: seven or eight, says Archbishop Healy, in the single town-land of Killeany, and one called after Saint Benen is virtually intact and may date from the sixth century. But the most interesting of all, *Teglach Eadna*, St. Enda's oratory, is a mere ruin: though outside of it pious islanders can show you the *leac*, or flagstone, under which the saint lies buried. In such places tradition passes from father to son unbroken, with a fidelity that has often been verified; and there is much reputable evidence which I would less readily believe.

At all events there is enough and to spare of interest in Aran for a week's visit or a month's; and if you spend that time there, it is odds but you shall run up against some scholar, German, Dane, or Frenchman, of European repute in Celtic scholarship, who has come here to study the ancient language and tradition where they are best preserved. Incidentally you may follow out the history of a great experiment in paternal legislation, the Congested Districts Board's successful attempt to develop a well-equipped fishing industry among these islanders, who had neither seaworthy boats nor nets of any considerable dimensions, nor when they caught it, any means of marketing their fish. All this is changed and much more with it: there are no more famines in Aran: and even in Aran an industrious and courageous man may gather a little prosperity about him without leaving the island of the saints and the way of life in which he was brought up.

II

That part of Mayo which adjoins Joyce country and Connemara is most easily reached by the coast road from Clifden by Leenane; and the drive from Leenane to Westport is famous. You pass through the defile of the Bundorragha river flowing into the north of Killary Bay—a mountain pass with Mweelrea gigantic on your left; and beyond that, farther along the same route, Croaghpatrick divides you from the sea, while inland is Nephin, the great cone that rises above Lough Conn.

All this very wild district was the territory of the O'Malleys, just as Connemara was of the O'Flahertys, but the O'Malleys have left a greater name in history—and a stronger stock, for to-day they have overflowed into the country of the other clan and dominate Connemara and Joyce country alike. But they have departed from their old tradition which linked them to the sea: and the most famous of all these western sea-rovers was a woman, Grace O'Malley, Granuaile, whose name has become one of the titles by which the spirit of nationalist Ireland is known in song. "Poor old Granuaile" is another appellation of the Shan van Vocht. This ruler of men and warrioress was a contemporary of Elizabeth's, and no mean opponent of Gloriana's power in the west. She married, diplomatically, first an O'Flaherty by whom she spread her influence over the shores of Galway as well as of Mayo, and what was more to her purpose, got control of his galleys as well as hers, and with them raided so far, that she carried over Lord Howth's heir from the strong castle a bare ten miles from Dublin. O'Flaherty dying, she bestowed her hand on a man of Norman stock, one of the Burkes, the MacWilliam, and through him got her own adherents posted in a string of castles—which purpose accomplished, so they say, she declared the union at an end. All the castles along the Mayo shore are associated with her name; but the place of her resting is in the little old church with vaulted roof (and still a trace of colour in the stonework) on Clare Island—most important of the long line which fringes that dangerous coast, from Inishboffin northwards. Aran belongs to a different grouping, its amazing formation links it to Burren, and it was, in truth, always owned by the O'Briens, lords of Thomond, the heart of which was Clare. But this string of petty island communities lies nearer the coast, is less separate from it—and yet, after all, very distinct. Land on Inishturk or Inishark, and the headman of the island will receive you with majestic courtesy—and he is still in some cases called the "king". But if you go there to collect rates for the county, I cannot promise you so kind a hospitality: there is unending though intermittent war, the islanders affirming (not unreasonably) that it is no business of theirs to pay for maintaining roads and bridges on the mainland.



CROAGH PATRICK, FROM OLDHEAD, CLEW BAY

Clare Island is somewhat unlike the rest, its people having always depended on agriculture rather than on fishing; and it is one of the best examples of the Congested Districts Board's beneficent work in purchasing the whole, reselling to the tenants, re-allotting farms, dividing off commonage, and providing materials and instruction for the islanders to put up decent dwellings for themselves. In earlier days rents were collected there at huge cost by the aid of posses of police; now instalments of purchase come in regularly and smoothly, and people who have begun to prosper a little by their holdings see no reason why they should not add to prosperity by taking their share of the sea's harvest. Herrings have come back to those waters, and it is no longer as it was when a spokesman of the people declared that "the shoals came and there was no one to catch them, and so the fish went away"—slighted, it would seem.

But Clare Island belongs to the outer fringe of the isles which lie across the entrance to Clew Bay, whose waters are sprinkled with little points and fields of sod-covered rock in a labyrinth past counting. Some affirm that the view from Westport over this blue water so bespeckled with green is the finest thing in all Ireland—and Croaghpatrick rising over against the little town is certainly a mountain worthy of all its associations.

Here takes place annually one of the most impressive ceremonies to be witnessed at home or abroad—the saying of mass at the summit to which St. Patrick, they say, pushed his western journey, and looking out over the Atlantic blessed all that he beheld. Ruder legend, with its touch of grotesque, tells that from this steep height he drove out into the deep all venomous things that had haunted unchristian Ireland, tumbling toads and snakes by his white

wizardry into the ocean depths.

Be that as it may, there are no snakes in Ireland, and St. Patrick's name is great there still—fitly celebrated when the archbishop of the West and of the isles climbs that long steep path, and there in the face of heaven celebrates the mysteries which link times old and times new, before a multitude which extends far away from him down the hill slope—for there are always laggards whose attendance at that strange mass finds them kneeling half a mile away.

Westport town has, what is rare in western Ireland, the look of being cared for: trees planted in a Mall by the little river make a pleasant feature, due to the fact that Lord Sligo's demesne adjoins the town, and that the lords territorial have here always been resident and always capable and executive persons. Wooded slopes, planted with an eye to beauty as well as to shelter, tell the same story and enrich the landscape, which is best seen from a low hill above the parsonage. But Westport town and its neighbourhood have been so often and so well described by the sharp-pointed pen which "George A. Birmingham" handles that one need only recall those witty volumes. I cannot pretend to place the island where "J. J.", the resourceful and philosophic curate, went to discover Spanish gold; but nearly any of them all would do.

A little farther along the coast on the way towards Achill is Newport, on a salmon river of some repute, which flows from the most enchanting lake to which my fishing ever took me. I reached Lough Beltra by a long ride from the other direction, and found it away in the hills with Nephin high over the eastern end, and Croaghpatrick filling the south-western outlook. The fishing was nothing to brag of, and I ate most of the few small sea trout that I caught in the kitchen at the keeper's cottage—but how good they were, grilled fresh out of the water, with mealy potatoes and butter, and an egg or two, and a dash of whisky in the tumbler of fresh milk. I should have liked to stay a week or a month in that neat, wholesome, comfortable cottage—where the only serious trouble was that pike had somehow got into this mountainy water, where no such brutes should be.

Mallaranny farther along the coast is the place where most people go to see Clew Bay, for the railway has put a good hotel there; but the real attraction of this coast is the amazing island of Achill, to which the railway has now been carried; or rather, to the bridge across the narrow sound which divides Achill from the mainland, and under which such a tide sweeps as can be seen hardly anywhere else.



THE MINAUN CLIFFS, ACHILL ISLAND

Achill is virtually all one mountain which has its highest points, Slievemore and Croghaun, on the outer seaward rim and they drop almost sheer into the sea. Slieve League itself in Donegal cannot vie with the wonder of those cliffs; and the little bays of Kim and Keel on the southward, with their curve of pure sand, have a kind of daintiness of beauty most bewitching in that grim landscape. From Dugort on the north shore there is boating to be had, which in fine weather may bring you into seal-haunted caves, under cliffs where the wild goats scramble in herds; and you may see readily enough strange creatures of the deep, sunfish, huge basking sharks, with every seabird that frequents these islands. Once it was my luck to effect a landing on a flat island rock some ten miles out, called the Bills of Achill, where I suppose not once in three years man sets his foot. It was the breeding season and the birds hardly moved to let us pass: puffins sat in the quaintest droves, three or four hundred together, staring at us with parrot eyes barely out of arm's reach. I looked over a ledge of rock and saw below me a guillemot on her eggs, so near that I could touch her—and as she fluttered off, realized why these birds have an egg so big at one end that it cannot roll except round in a circle—for they are laid by two and three on a bare shelf of rock where the bird has hardly room to cover them. Only the great black-backed gulls forsook the island and their nests, soaring high into the air in hundreds where we landed, and leaving their big, ugly eggs and their big, ungainly young ones sprawling all over the turf. They are great robbers of other people's nests, worse than hawks on a grouse moor: but they provide securely for their own young, building only here and in one or two other places equally inaccessible.

But for all that it may offer of wildness, of grandeur, and of interest, Achill has no charm for me. Poverty is a show there: in the village of Keel can still be seen beehive-shaped wigwams rather than houses; and it always seems as if the elements there had been too strong for man and left him huddled and cowering on the earth. Famine, or at least continuous underfeeding through generations, has helped that work. Yet the Achill folk set out hardily year by year in companies, men in their troops, girls in theirs, to field labour in different parts of Great Britain. It is thus that the population of some thousands supports itself on that barren promontory—pitifully enough, heaven knows. No doubt

the sea is at their doors rich in fish; but the sea that runs off Achill Head is a very different antagonist from what men wrestle with in the English Channel.

Yet Achill has been just big enough to encourage its people with a barren hope of finding a living on the land. It is the real islanders who reap the harvest: and now a strange new source of prosperity has come to one of these communities. Just north of Achill Head, outside the long peninsula of Belmullet which encloses Blacksod Bay, lie the two islands of Inishkee, and on the south island some few years ago a Norwegian company established a whaling station of the new type.

The Gulf Stream sweeps along here within a few miles of the coast, and whales, it seems, spend their lives strolling peaceably along its course, following always one direction. They stroll less peaceably nowadays, for from these islands steamers push out and harry them with new-fangled harpoons fired from a gun and headed with a bomb as well as the barb. The result is that whereas old-time whalers could only kill the "right" whale which is fat and leisurely, and stays long on the surface, your modern captain makes prey of everything, manœuvring his steamer so as to get on to the whale's line, and fire the harpoon into him when he rises porpoise fashion for one swift tumble. In this way they kill—not without difficulty and danger—the lean, swift monsters, eighty or ninety feet in length, rorquals, and the rest, which can drag even the steamers about after them; and, having killed, they couple up the whale beside the steamer, as you may see a barge beside a tug-boat on the Thames, and run back to their station where the huge fish is dragged on shore, cut up, separated into its constituents of blubber, bone, and entrails—but every particle of it converted into some kind of use; what is not oil is desiccated and makes feeding cake, and what is not feeding cake makes manure. All this boiling down has two effects—one a prodigious stench which, some say, makes houses uninhabitable on the mainland six miles off; the second, a vast deal of employment for the islanders—of one island only. Work on the whaling station is jealously guarded for southern Inishkee; woe betide the man even of the northern island who should try to get a share of it. As for the folk of the mainland, Inishkee employs them (at a very modest wage) to attend to its potato patches and oat fields in the summer, while the privileged folk are at a special wage on the whaler's work. So far as I can learn, protection has never been more rigorously employed than by this energetic community.

From the point of the Mullet to Erris Head, and across Broadhaven to Benwee Head and Portacloy, runs the wildest country and the most inaccessible in these islands. I have reached it only from the sea, and never anywhere in Ireland have I seen people so far removed from civilization as rowed out in their currachs to meet us. Yet—so odd a place is Ireland—it is ten chances to one but in the loneliest of these creeks and mountains you would find folk who knew the great cities of America, and who if they landed in Boston or New York would find friends and kindred in plenty to greet them and help them to a living. Life is not so difficult here as it was formerly: for nowadays the trade in lobster fishing becomes very profitable on this unexploited coast, with its profusion of kelp-covered rocks and islands, and they have learnt in late years to take their toll of the salmon droves that pass this headland, making for Galway or the Shannon. What they have to sell, what they win at risk of life in the tremendous sea that runs among their rocks, they can sell now at a fair price. There is talk, too, of carrying a railway along the Mullet, in the hope of making Blacksod a haven for transatlantic commerce, and when that happens, the country will be gradually changed, as I have seen in my lifetime similar regions changed in Donegal; but till that day, whoever wants to see Ireland as Ireland has been any time for three or thirteen centuries (altered only by the introduction of three things, tea, paraffin oil, and American flour) can see it only in the northern parts of the Barony of Erris. It is no place to go for comfort; but "for to admire and for to see" it is well worth while.



NEPHIN, FROM LOUGH CONN

The train will take you to Ballina, a considerable town, with a famous fishing on the River Moy, which can be had on easy terms—and nowadays even so far as Killala, on a bay which is for ever associated with a romantic episode in Irish history. Here Humbert landed in 1798—a month too late, for the great Wexford rising had been crushed out by July, and when he came in August all the forces in the country could be mobilized to meet his tiny army of republican French (Humbert was no Bonapartist) and their backing of half-armed and untrained Connaughtmen. Yet against all odds, the republican, with Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity in his heart as well as on his lips, pushed from Ballina to Castlebar, the capital town of Mayo, and there inflicted upon General Lake such a defeat as finally branded a name already deeply disgraced by the most brutal cruelties. It was a wonderful feat but wholly useless, for Humbert after

forcing his way actually into Leinster was surrounded and forced to surrender without making terms for his Irish backers—upon whom Lake was free to avenge his own repulse in massacre. One of the strangest documents in history is the narrative of the Protestant Bishop of Killala, Dr. Stock, who was captured and most kindly treated during the raid.

All the shores of Killala Bay are prosperous and planted; you reach the beginning of wild country at Ballycastle, where I have pleasant memories of a little inn kept by the postmistress. Beyond that, the road is unknown to me; but another way into the heart of Erris leads out from Ballina through Crossmolina on Lough Conn. So far as this all is level land; and about this wide lake, famous for fishing (though its repute has sadly fallen away), are plenty of places to stay in. Nephin rises from its west shore, a magnificent mountain; and the whole place is well worth seeing, and the best way to see it is to fish a day on the lake, trolling or casting as you will—with the chance, especially if you troll, of big pike or salmon.

Beyond Crossmolina one runs into the wilds, with no stopping place for many miles till you reach Bangor Erris on the lower waters of the Owenmore River, which flows into Blacksod Bay. Here is a hotel, not so famous as it used to be in old days—but you will be all the better for that. The host of those days provided entertainment for the mind, but the bodies of his guests suffered some discomfort. "I left my boots outside my door last night and they were never touched," said one indignant protester. "And if you left a watch and a purse of gold with it, it's the same way they would be," the host answered triumphantly.

I stayed a fortnight there once, with an Englishman who had never seen Ireland before; and everything happened to us that happens in Lever's novels and that we all declare happens no longer. Our own water was poached to extinction; but we made friends with the most skilful angler I have seen (Dan Keary is his name, at your service), who escorted us to fish on a little stream high in the mountain, where in a raging flood we caught more big sea trout than either of us would have cared to carry and came home triumphant—to be confronted a couple of days later with the indignant owner of that water who wanted to know what we had been doing there. The upshot was that we had had the best day's fishing of many years, and made close alliance with the gentleman whose preserves we had innocently invaded. And I have no doubt that Dan spoke the exact truth when he said that he had been fishing that water all his life as often as the fancy took him.

Nowadays much of the land (if it can be called land) about these parts has been bought by the tenants, who lease out the shooting and fishing and pay their instalments of purchase with the proceeds—an admirable condition under which both shooting and fishing are likely to improve. But except for fishing and shooting I cannot recommend anyone to go to Bangor Erris, which is the most desolate spot that I have ever trodden. Distant views of Achill's high peaks made the one element of beauty in that depressing landscape—where, nevertheless, I would gladly go back, to try my luck once again on that wildly rushing stream that comes down, a torrent from Corrsliabh.

III

Sligo town in itself is well worth a pilgrimage, if only because, unlike other towns in western Ireland, it is making modest advances towards prosperity: and for the lover of beauty it makes the centre of a district rich in scenery, rich in historic associations, and in monuments of a time far before written history.



LOUGH GILL

The town lies at the outfall of a short broad river which flows from Lough Gill, and the row up to that lake with Hazelwood demesne on your left, rich in varied wooding, may honestly challenge a comparison with whatever is finest at Killarney. The lake itself is girded about with mountains, not perhaps so picturesque as Carrantuohil and Mangerton, yet far more known in story. On the west is Knocknarea, crowned with the huge cairn of stones which is named after Maeve, the fierce Queen of Connaught, wife of Ailill, lover of Fergus MacRoy, she who headed the great hosting into Ulster for the Brown Bull of Cooley. Yet earlier by far than this deposit of legend must be placed the great stone remains at Carrowmore three miles out of the town and in Hazelwood demesne. At Carrowmore are stone circles, cromlechs, and subterranean chambers of stone—all far prehistoric: in Hazelwood are what can be seen nowhere else in these islands but at Stonehenge—huge trilithons, part in the ritual of some Druidic cult.

All these, I confess, seem to me to belong to the dusty domain of archæologists; but Maeve figures in a story which before long may be as well known as the epic of the Nibelungs, so strong is the grip which Gaelic mythology begins to take upon the imagination of the world—an imagination guided by Irish-born poets, not the least of whom has his native place here in Sligo. William Butler Yeats was born and nurtured here, and these names and these hills and rivers coloured his earliest poetry.

From Maeve's cairn—it is an easy climb—you can see north of you to all the mountains of West Donegal, from Barnesmore to Slieve League and Glen Head: south and west you can see the heights of Mayo, Nephin farthest inland, then Croaghpatrick—and stretching away far out to the western sea, the long cliffy shore of Erris, ending up with those peaked rocks, the Stags of Broadhaven.

But more famous by far than Knocknarea is the greater mountain, flat-topped Benbulbin, which lies north of the lake and the town. And for those who would know the beauties of this county, as I unhappily do not know them, the place of all places to visit is the road which, following the coast, turns round the shoulder of Benbulbin, and so running inwards along the south shore of Donegal Bay, brings you ultimately to the pleasant watering-place of Bundoran. And, since I must write of what I know, let me limit myself to two of the historic associations of that drive.

One of these memories is legendary. In the cycle of stories which deal with the deeds of Finn MacCool and the Fianna of Ireland, it is told how Finn, old and subtle and strong, went to Tara to be married to the High King's daughter; but she, the Lady Gránia, cast eyes of desire on one of the Fianna, Diarmuid of the curling dusky hair and the berry-red cheeks, who was reputed for the best lover of women in all the world: and, drugging the guest cup, Gránia fled with Diarmuid, till after many escapes and wanderings, the two made their peace with Finn and with the High King Cormac MacArt, and settled down to dwell on the round hill of Keshcorran in County Sligo. Long years they lived together, and Diarmuid was content, but Gránia, the king's daughter, thought her house slighted because the two greatest men in Ireland, Finn MacCool and Cormac MacArt, had never entered its door. "They are enemies to me," said Diarmuid. "Make a feast and win their friendship," said Gránia, and it was agreed; so Cormac with his counsellors and Finn with his Fianna came and hunted for many days about Keshcorran and feasted for many nights in Rath Grainne. But at last a day came when they were hunting, and omens had warned Diarmuid to stay back from the chase: but he set them aside, and followed the hunt to the top of Benbulbin and there was Finn standing alone. "It is the wild boar of Benbulbin they are hunting," said Finn, "and it is an enchanted beast, and its fate is to have life while you live, Diarmuid, and to die when you die." Then Diarmuid knew that the wizard Finn had planned this hunt for his death and he reproached him; but Finn turned away, and when the boar came against Diarmuid it found him alone, and armed only with light weapons. The fight raged down the mountain and up it again, Diarmuid

bestriding the beast to avoid its tusks; but at last the boar threw him and ripped his bowels; but with a last stroke of his broken weapon Diarmuid slew the boar. Then as he lay mangled, Finn came up and taunted him with the wreck of his beauty and wished that all the women of Ireland were at hand to look at him. But Diarmuid called on Finn to use his magical powers and bring water in his hands to heal the wounds of his body; and he appealed to his comrades of the Fianna, Ossian and Oscar, who were with Finn, calling up memories of the times when he had saved Finn and the Fianna from destruction: and Oscar took part with Diarmuid, bidding Finn bring the water and heal the man. Twice Finn went to the well and made a cup of his hands and fetched the water, and twice he let it flow through his fingers, having thought upon Gránia. Then Oscar threatened him with battle and Finn fetched it the third time, but as he came up, the breath left Diarmuid's body, and his comrades keened for him there on the mountain and cursed Finn's treachery.

And when they came back to Keshcorran, Gránia knew what had happened, and she went to her sons who were nearly grown men, and bade them seek vengeance for their father. Finn sought to muster the Fianna to crush out the revolt that threatened, but Ossian and Oscar rose up and laid all the blame on him, and bade him settle the quarrel by himself for it was of his own making. And Finn, since violence failed him, had recourse to craft, and went to Gránia's house and greeted her cunningly and with sweet words. The more she railed upon him, the more he flattered and wooed and plied her "with sweet words and loving discourse until he had brought her to his own will and he had the desire of his heart and soul of her", and carried her with him to his own place.

But when the Fianna saw Finn and Gránia coming towards them, "they gave one shout of derision and mockery at her so that Gránia bowed her head in shame". And so ends in cynical bitterness the story of the love of Diarmuid and Gránia, and of the hunt on Benbulbin.

The other story whose ghosts you may waken on that beautiful drive belongs to a more recent cycle—the epic of the Spanish Armada. Skeletons of vast ships laden with men and arms and treasure lie crusted with shell and seaweed all down this north-western shore of Ireland from Inishowen to Blacksod: but the greatest wreckage of all was on the Streedagh Strand which stretches away to Bundoran. Three great vessels went ashore here, and the long beach was strewn with more than a thousand corpses, with shattered timbers, boats, huge masts, and all the flotsam and jetsam of that vast defeat.

It is a tragic memory: most of the memories in Connaught have a tragic cast. This windy, western province has always had its double dose of the sorrows in a sorrowful land; and the Connaughtman's gaiety wears a touch of the recklessness which knows some kinship with despair. Yet to make holiday in, to hunt or shoot or fish in, no part of all Ireland is better, nor is there any where the country folk have more enchanting and endearing ways. Famine, the gaunt spectre which haunted them, has been banished from their ken; and the years that are to come may well bring to the west much that it lacked without taking away or abating one jot of its glamour and its charm.

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