

THE ARAN ISLANDS

PARTS III AND IV

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THE ARAN ISLANDS

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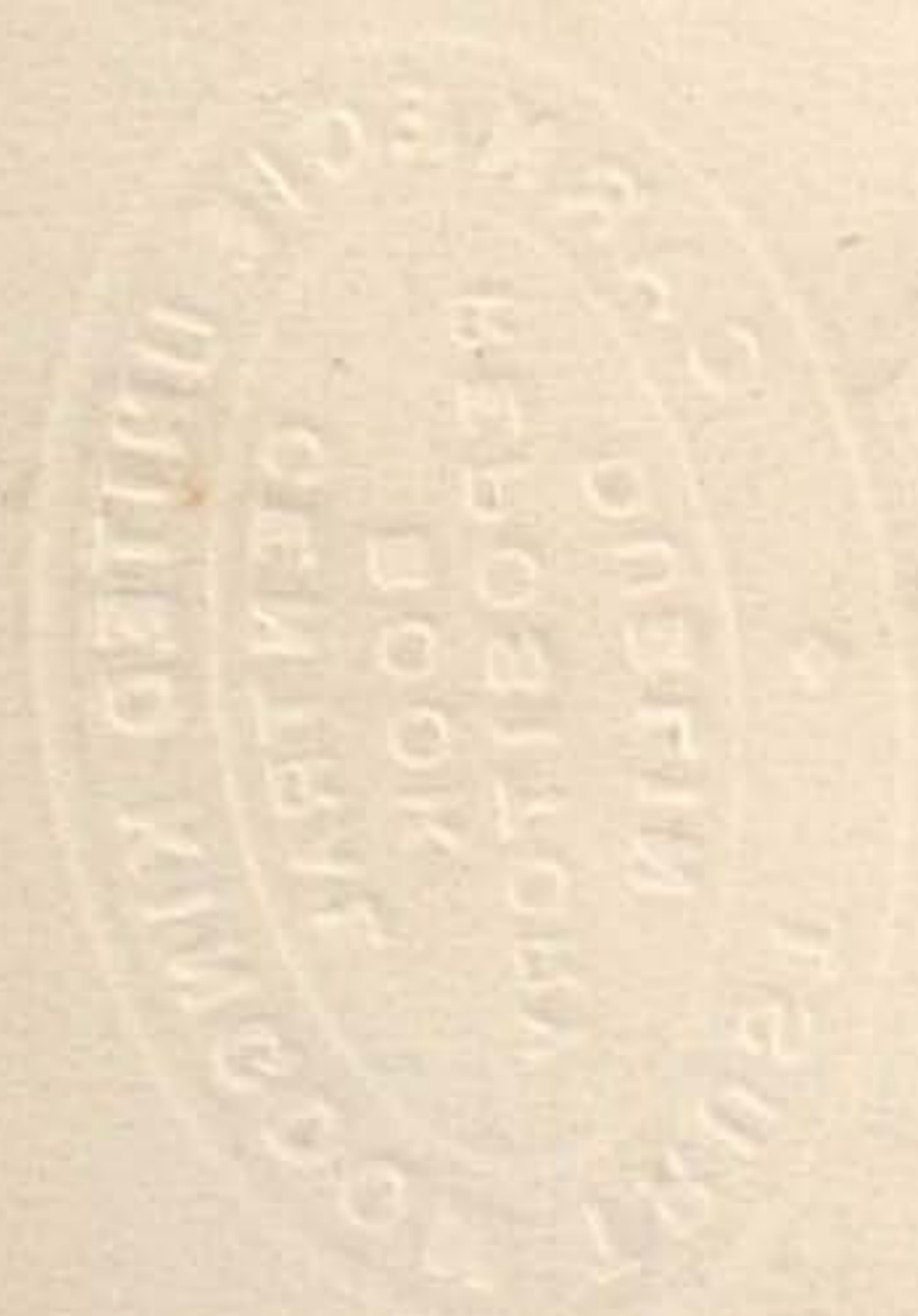
PARTS III AND IV

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THE ARAN ISLANDS

PART III

A LETTER has come from Michael while I am in Paris. It is in English.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I hope that you are in good health since I have heard from you before ; it's many a time I do think of you since, and it was not forgetting you I was for the future.

I was at home in the beginning of March for a fortnight and was very bad with the Influence, but I took good care of myself.

I am getting good wages from the first of this year, and I am afraid I won't be able to stand with it, although it is not hard ; I am working in a saw-mills and getting the money for the wood and keeping an account of it.

I am getting a letter and some news from home two or three times a week, and they are all well in health, and your friends in the island as well as if I mentioned them.

Did you see any of my friends in Dublin, Mr. ——— or any of those gentlemen or gentlewomen ?

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I think I soon try America but not until next year if I am alive.

I hope we might meet again in good and pleasant health.

It is now time to come to a conclusion, good-bye and not for ever, write soon.—I am your friend in Galway.

Write soon dear friend.

Another letter in a more rhetorical mood.

MY DEAR MR. S.,—I am for a long time trying to spare a little time for to write a few words to you.

Hoping that you are still considering good and pleasant health since I got a letter from you before.

I see now that your time is coming round to come to this place to learn your native language. There was a great Feis in this island two weeks ago, and there was a very large attendance from the south island, and not very many from the north.

Two cousins of my own have been in this house for three weeks or beyond it, but now they are gone, and there is a place for you if you wish to come, and you can write before you and we'll try and manage you as well as we can.

I am at home now for about two months, for

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the mill was burnt where I was at work. After that I was in Dublin, but I did not get my health in that city.—*Mise le mor mheas ort a chara.*

Soon after I received this letter I wrote to Michael to say that I was going back to them. This time I chose a day when the steamer went direct to the middle island, and as we came up between the two lines of curaghs that were waiting outside the slip, I saw Michael, dressed once more in his island clothes, rowing in one of them.

He made no sign of recognition, but as soon as they could get alongside he clambered on board and came straight up on the bridge to where I was.

‘Bh-fuil tu go maith?’ (‘Are you well?’) he said. ‘Where is your bag?’

His curagh had got a bad place near the bow of the steamer, so I was slung down from a considerable height on top of some sacks of flour and my own bag, while the curagh swayed and battered itself against the side.

When we were clear I asked Michael if he had got my letter.

‘Ah no,’ he said, ‘not a sight of it ; but maybe it will come next week.’

Part of the slip had been washed away during the winter, so we had to land to the left of it,

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among the rocks, taking our turn with the other curaghs that were coming in.

As soon as I was on shore the men crowded round me to bid me welcome, asking me as they shook hands if I had travelled far in the winter, and seen many wonders, ending, as usual, with the inquiry if there was much war at present in the world.

It gave me a thrill of delight to hear their Gaelic blessings, and to see the steamer moving away, leaving me quite alone among them. The day was fine, with a clear sky ; and the sea was glittering beyond the limestone. Further off a light haze on the cliffs of the larger island, and on the Connaught hills, gave me the illusion that it was still summer.

A little boy was sent off to tell the old woman that I was coming, and we followed slowly, talking and carrying the baggage.

When I had exhausted my news they told me theirs. A power of strangers—four or five—a French priest among them, had been on the island in the summer ; the potatoes were bad, but the rye had begun well, till a dry week came, and then it had turned into oats.

‘If you didn’t know us so well,’ said the man who was talking, ‘you’d think it was a lie we were telling, but the sorrow a lie is in it. It grew straight and well till it was as high as your

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knee, then it turned into oats. Did ever you see the like of that in County Wicklow?’

In the cottage everything was as usual ; but Michael’s presence has brought back the old woman’s humour and contentment. As I sat down on my stool and lit my pipe with the corner of a sod, I could have cried out with the feeling of festivity that this return procured me.

This year Michael is busy in the daytime, but at present there is a harvest moon, and we spend most of the evening wandering about the island, looking out over the bay where the shadows of the clouds throw strange patterns of gold and black. As we were returning through the village this evening a tumult of revelry broke out from one of the smaller cottages, and Michael said it was the young boys and girls who have sport at this time of the year. I would have liked to join them, but feared to embarrass their amusement. When we passed on again the groups of scattered cottages on each side of the way reminded me of places I have sometimes passed when travelling at night in France or Bavaria, places that seemed so enshrined in the blue silence of night one could not believe they reawaken.

Afterwards we went up on the dun, where Michael said he had never been before after

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nightfall, though he lives within a stone's throw. The place gains unexpected grandeur in this light, standing out like a corona of prehistoric stone upon the summit of the island. We walked round the top of the wall for some time looking down on the faint yellow roofs, with the rocks glittering beyond them, and the silence of the bay. Though Michael is sensible of the beauty of the nature round him, he never speaks of it directly, and many of our evening walks are occupied with long Gaelic discourses about the movements of the stars and moon.

These people make no distinction between the natural and the supernatural.

This afternoon—it was Sunday, when there is usually some interesting talk among the islanders—it rained, so I went into the schoolmaster's kitchen, which is a good deal frequented by the more advanced among the people. I know so little of their ways of fishing and farming that I do not find it easy to keep up our talk without reaching matters where they cannot follow me, and since the novelty of my photographs has passed off I have some difficulty in giving them the entertainment they seem to expect from my company. To-day I showed them some simple gymnastic feats and conjurer's tricks, which gave them great amusement.

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‘Tell us now,’ said an old woman when I had finished, ‘didn’t you learn those things from the witches that do be out in the country?’

In one of the tricks I seemed to join a piece of string which was cut by the people, and the illusion was so complete that I saw one man going off with it into the corner and pulling at the apparent joining till he sank red furrows round his hands.

Then he brought it back to me.

‘Bedad,’ he said, ‘this is the greatest wonder ever I seen. The cord is a taste thinner where you joined it but as strong as ever it was.’

A few of the younger men looked doubtful, but the older people, who have watched the rye turning into oats, seemed to accept the magic frankly, and did not show any surprise that a ‘duine uasal’ (a noble person) should be able to do like the witches.

My intercourse with these people has made me realize that miracles must abound wherever the new conception of law is not understood. On these islands alone miracles enough happen every year to equip a divine emissary. Rye is turned into oats, storms are raised to keep evictors from the shore, cows that are isolated on lonely rocks bring forth calves, and other things of the same kind are common.

The wonder is a rare expected event, like the

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thunderstorm or the rainbow, except that it is a little rarer and a little more wonderful. Often, when I am walking and get into conversation with some of the people, and tell them that I have received a paper from Dublin, they ask me :

‘ And is there any great wonder in the world at this time ? ’

When I had finished my feats of dexterity, I was surprised to find that none of the islanders, even the youngest and most agile, could do what I did. As I pulled their limbs about in my effort to teach them, I felt that the ease and beauty of their movements has made me think them lighter than they really are. Seen in their curaghs between these cliffs and the Atlantic, they appear lithe and small, but if they were dressed as we are and seen in an ordinary room, many of them would seem heavily and powerfully made.

One man, however, the champion dancer of the island, got up after a while and displayed the salmon leap—lying flat on his face and then springing up, horizontally, high in the air—and some other feats of extraordinary agility, but he is not young and we could not get him to dance.

In the evening I had to repeat my tricks here in the kitchen, for the fame of them had spread over the island.

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No doubt these feats will be remembered here for generations. The people have so few images for description that they seize on anything that is remarkable in their visitors and use it afterwards in their talk.

For the last few years when they are speaking of anyone with fine rings they say : 'She had beautiful rings on her fingers like Lady ——,' a visitor to the island.

I have been down sitting on the pier till it was quite dark. I am only beginning to understand the nights of Inishmaan and the influence they have had in giving distinction to these men, who do most of their work after nightfall.

I could hear nothing but a few curlews and other wild-fowl whistling and shrieking in the seaweed, and the low rustling of the waves. It was one of the dark sultry nights peculiar to September, with no light anywhere except the phosphorescence of the sea, and an occasional rift in the clouds that showed the stars behind them.

The sense of solitude was immense. I could not see or realize my own body, and I seemed to exist merely in my perception of the waves and of the crying birds, and of the smell of seaweed.

When I tried to come home I lost myself

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among the sandhills, and the night seemed to grow unutterably cold and dejected, as I groped among slimy masses of seaweed and wet crumbling walls.

Afrer a while I heard a movement in the sand, and two grey shadows appeared beside me. They were two men who were going home from fishing. I spoke to them and knew their voices, and we went home together.

In the autumn season the threshing of the rye is one of the many tasks that fall to the men and boys. The sheaves are collected on a bare rock, and then each is beaten separately on a couple of stones placed on end one against the other. The land is so poor that a field hardly produces more grain than is needed for seed the following year, so the rye-growing is carried on merely for the straw, which is used for thatching.

The stooks are carried to and from the threshing field, piled on donkeys that one meets everywhere at this season, with their black, unbridled heads just visible beneath a pinnacle of golden straw.

While the threshing is going on sons and daughters keep turning up with one thing and another till there is a little crowd on the rocks, and anyone who is passing stops for an hour or two to talk on his way to the sea, so that, like

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the kelp-burning in the summer-time, this work is full of sociability.

When the threshing is over the straw is taken up to the cottages and piled up in an outhouse, or more often in a corner of the kitchen, where it brings a new liveliness of colour.

A few days ago, when I was visiting a cottage where there are the most beautiful children on the island, the eldest daughter, a girl of about fourteen, went and sat down on a heap of straw by the doorway. A ray of sunlight fell on her and on a portion of the rye, giving her figure and red dress with the straw under it a curious relief against the nets and oilskins, and forming a natural picture of exquisite harmony and colour.

In our own cottage the thatching—it is done every year—has just been carried out. The rope-twisting was done partly in the lane, partly in the kitchen when the weather was uncertain. Two men usually sit together at this work, one of them hammering the straw with a heavy block of wood, the other forming the rope, the main body of which is twisted by a boy or girl with a bent stick specially formed for this employment.

In wet weather, when the work must be done indoors, the person who is twisting recedes gradually out of the door, across the lane, and

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sometimes across a field or two beyond it. A great length is needed to form the close network which is spread over the thatch, as each piece measures about fifty yards. When this work is in progress in half the cottages of the village, the road has a curious look, and one has to pick one's steps through a maze of twisting ropes that pass from the dark doorways on either side into the fields.

When four or five immense balls of rope have been completed, a thatching party is arranged, and before dawn some morning they come down to the house, and the work is taken in hand with such energy that it is usually ended within the day.

Like all work that is done in common on the island, the thatching is regarded as a sort of festival. From the moment a roof is taken in hand there is a whirl of laughter and talk till it is ended ; and, as the man whose house is being covered is a host instead of an employer, he lays himself out to please the men who work with him.

The day our own house was thatched the large table was taken into the kitchen from my room, and high teas were given every few hours. Most of the people who came along the road turned down into the kitchen for a few minutes, and the talking was incessant. Once when I

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went into the window I heard Michael retailing my astronomical lectures from the apex of the gable ; but usually their topics have to do with the affairs of the island.

It is likely that much of the intelligence and charm of these people is due to the absence of any division of labour, and to the correspondingly wide development of each individual, whose varied knowledge and skill necessitates a considerable activity of mind. Each man can speak two languages. He is a skilled fisherman, and can manage a curagh with extraordinary nerve and dexterity. He can farm simply, burn kelp, cut out pampooties, mend nets, build and thatch a house, and make a cradle or a coffin. His work changes with the seasons in a way that keeps him free from the dullness that comes to people who have always the same occupation. The danger of his life on the sea gives him the alertness of a primitive hunter, and the long nights he spends fishing in his curagh bring him some of the emotions that are thought peculiar to men who have lived with the arts.

As Michael is busy in the daytime, I have got a boy to come up and read Irish to me every afternoon. He is about fifteen, and is singularly intelligent, with a real sympathy for the language and the stories we read.

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One evening, when he had been reading to me for two hours, I asked him if he was tired.

‘Tired?’ he said; ‘sure you wouldn’t ever be tired reading!’

A few years ago this predisposition for intellectual things would have made him sit with old people and learn their stories; but now boys like him turn to books and to papers in Irish that are sent them from Dublin.

In most of the stories we read, where the English and Irish are printed side by side, I see him looking across to the English in passages that are a little obscure, though he is indignant if I say that he knows English better than Irish. Probably he knows the local Irish better than English, and printed English better than printed Irish, as the latter has frequent dialectic forms he does not know.

A few days ago, when he was reading a folk-tale from Douglas Hyde’s *Beside the Fire*, something caught his eye in the translation.

‘There’s a mistake in the English,’ he said, after a moment’s hesitation; ‘he’s put “gold chair” instead of “golden chair.”’

I pointed out that we speak of gold watches and gold pins.

‘And why wouldn’t we?’ he said; ‘but “golden chair” would be much nicer.’

It is curious to see how his rudimentary

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culture has given him the beginning of a critical spirit that occupies itself with the form of language as well as with ideas.

One day I alluded to my trick of joining string.

‘You can’t join a string, don’t be saying it,’ he said ; ‘I don’t know what way you’re after fooling us, but you didn’t join that string, not a bit of you.’

Another day when he was with me the fire burned low, and I held up a newspaper before it to make a draught. It did not answer very well, and though the boy said nothing I saw he thought me a fool.

The next day he ran up in great excitement.

‘I’m after trying the paper over the fire,’ he said, ‘and it burned grand. Didn’t I think, when I seen you doing it, there was no good in it at all ; but I put a paper over the master’s’ (the schoolmaster’s) ‘fire and it flamed up. Then I pulled back the corner of the paper and I ran my head in, and believe me, there was a big cold wind blowing up the chimney that would sweep the head from you.’

We nearly quarrelled because he wanted me to take his photograph in his Sunday clothes from Galway, instead of his native homespuns that become him far better, though he does not like them, as they seem to connect him with the

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primitive life of the island. With his keen temperament, he may go far if he can ever step out into the world.

He is constantly thinking.

One day he asked me if there was great wonder on their names out in the country.

I said there was no wonder on them at all.

‘Well, he said, ‘there is great wonder on your name in the island, and I was thinking maybe there would be great wonder on our names out in the country.’

In a sense he is right. Though the names here are ordinary enough, they are used in a way that differs altogether from the modern system of surnames.

When a child begins to wander about the island, the neighbours speak of it by its Christian name, followed by the Christian name of its father. If this is not enough to identify it, the father’s epithet—whether it is a nickname or the name of his own father—is added.

Sometimes when the father’s name does not lend itself, the mother’s Christian name is adopted as epithet for the children.

An old woman near this cottage is called ‘Peggeen,’ and her sons are ‘Patch Pheggeen,’ ‘Seaghan Pheggeen,’ etc.

Occasionally the surname is employed in its Irish form, but I have not heard them using the

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‘Mac’ prefix when speaking Irish among themselves; perhaps the idea of a surname which it gives is too modern for them, perhaps they do use it at times that I have not noticed.

Sometimes a man is named from the colour of his hair. There is thus a Seaghan Ruadh (‘Red John’), and his children are ‘Mourteen Seaghan Ruadh,’ etc.

Another man is known as ‘an iasgaire’ (‘the fisher’), and his children are ‘Maire an iasgaire’ (‘Mary daughter of the fisher’), and so on.

The schoolmaster tells me that when he reads out the roll in the morning the children repeat the local name all together in a whisper after each official name, and then the child answers. If he calls, for instance, ‘Patrick O’Flaharty,’ the children murmur, ‘Patch Seaghan Dearg,’ or some such name, and the boy answers.

People who come to the island are treated in much the same way. A French Gaelic student was in the islands recently, and he is always spoken of as ‘An Saggart Ruadh’ (‘the red priest’) or as ‘An Saggart Francach’ (‘the French priest’), but never by his name.

If an islander’s name alone is enough to distinguish him it is used by itself, and I know one man who is spoken of as Eamonn. There may be other Edmunds on the island, but if so they

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have probably good nicknames or epithets of their own.

In other countries where the names are in a somewhat similar condition, as in modern Greece, the man's calling is usually one of the most common means of distinguishing him, but in this place, where all have the same calling, this means is not available.

Late this evening I saw a three-oared curagh with two old women in her besides the rowers, landing at the slip through a heavy roll. They were coming from Inishere, and they rowed up quickly enough till they were within a few yards of the surf-line, where they spun round and waited with the prow towards the sea, while wave after wave passed underneath them and broke on the remains of the slip. Five minutes passed; ten minutes; and still they waited with the oars just paddling in the water, and their heads turned over their shoulders.

I was beginning to think that they would have to give up and row round to the lee side of the island, when the curagh seemed suddenly to turn into a living thing. The prow was again towards the slip, leaping and hurling itself through the spray. Before it touched, the man in the bow wheeled round, two white legs came out over the prow like the flash of a sword, and

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before the next wave arrived he had dragged the curagh out of danger.

This sudden and united action in men without discipline shows well the education that the waves have given them. When the curagh was in safety the two old women were carried up through the surf and slippery seaweed on the backs of their sons.

In this broken weather a curagh cannot go out without danger, yet accidents are rare and seem to be nearly always caused by drink. Since I was here last year four men have been drowned on their way home from the large island. First a curagh belonging to the south island, which put off with two men in her heavy with drink, came to shore here the next evening dry and uninjured, with the sail half set, and no one in her.

More recently a curagh from this island with three men, who were the worse for drink, was upset on its way home. The steamer was not far off, and saved two of the men, but could not reach the third.

Now a man has been washed ashore in Donegal with one pampooty on him, and a striped shirt with a purse in one of the pockets, and a box for tobacco.

For three days the people here have been trying to fix his identity. Some think it is the

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man from this island, others think that the man from the south answers the description more exactly. To-night, as we were returning from the slip, we met the mother of the man who was drowned from this island, still weeping and looking out over the sea. She stopped the people who had come over from the south island to ask them with a terrified whisper what is thought over there.

Later in the evening, when I was sitting in one of the cottages, the sister of the dead man came in through the rain with her infant, and there was a long talk about the rumours that had come in. She pieced together all she could remember about his clothes, and what his purse was like, and where he had got it, and the same for his tobacco box, and his stockings. In the end there seemed little doubt that it was her brother.

‘Ah!’ she said, ‘it’s Mike sure enough, and please God they’ll give him a decent burial.’

Then she began to keen slowly to herself. She had loose yellow hair plastered round her head with the rain, and as she sat by the door suckling her infant, she seemed like a type of the women’s life upon the islands.

For a while the people sat silent, and one could hear nothing but the lips of the infant, the rain hissing in the yard, and the breathing

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of four pigs that lay sleeping in one corner. Then one of the men began to talk about the new boats that have been sent to the south island, and the conversation went back to its usual round of topics.

The loss of one man seems a slight catastrophe to all except the immediate relatives. Often when an accident happens a father is lost with his two eldest sons, or in some other way all the active men of a household die together.

A few years ago three men of a family that used to make the wooden vessels—like tiny barrels—that are still used among the people, went to the big island together. They were drowned on their way home, and the art of making these little barrels died with them, at least on Inishmaan, though it still lingers in the north and south islands.

Another catastrophe that took place last winter gave a curious zest to the observance of holy days. It seems that it is not the custom for the men to go out fishing on the evening of a holy day, but one night last December some men, who wished to begin fishing early the next morning, rowed out to sleep in their hookers.

Towards morning a terrible storm rose, and several hookers with their crews on board were blown from their moorings and wrecked. The

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sea was so high that no attempt at rescue could be made, and the men were drowned.

‘Ah!’ said the man who told me the story, ‘I’m thinking it will be a long time before men will go out again on a holy day. That storm was the only storm that reached into the harbour the whole winter, and I’m thinking there was something in it.’

To-day when I went down to the slip I found a pig-jobber from Kilronan with about twenty pigs that were to be shipped for the English market.

When the steamer was getting near, the whole drove was moved down on the slip and the curaghs were carried out close to the sea. Then each beast was caught in its turn and thrown on its side, while its legs were hitched together in a single knot, with a tag of rope remaining, by which it could be carried.

Probably the pain inflicted was not great, yet the animals shut their eyes and shrieked with almost human intonations, till the suggestion of the noise became so intense that the men and women who were merely looking on grew wild with excitement, and the pigs waiting their turn foamed at the mouth and tore each other with their teeth.

After a while there was a pause. The whole

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slip was covered with a mass of sobbing animals, with here and there a terrified woman crouching among the bodies, and patting some special favourite to keep it quiet while the curaghs were being launched.

Then the screaming began again while the pigs were carried out and laid in their places, with a waistcoat tied round their feet to keep them from damaging the canvas. They seemed to know where they were going, and looked up at me over the gunwale with an ignoble desperation that made me shudder to think that I had eaten of this whimpering flesh. When the last curagh went out I was left on the slip with a band of women and children, and one old boar who sat looking out over the sea.

The women were over-excited, and when I tried to talk to them they crowded round me and began jeering and shrieking at me because I am not married. A dozen screamed at a time, and so rapidly that I could not understand all they were saying, yet I was able to make out that they were taking advantage of the absence of their husbands to give me the full volume of their contempt. Some little boys who were listening threw themselves down, writhing with laughter among the seaweed, and the young girls grew red with embarrassment and stared down into the surf.

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For a moment I was in confusion. I tried to speak to them, but I could not make myself heard ; so I sat down on the slip and drew out my wallet of photographs. In an instant I had the whole band clambering round me, in their ordinary mood.

When the curaghs came back—one of them towing a large kitchen table that stood itself up on the waves and then turned somersaults in an extraordinary manner—word went round that the ceannuighe (pedlar) was arriving.

He opened his wares on the slip as soon as he landed, and sold a quantity of cheap knives and jewellery to the girls and younger women. He spoke no Irish, and the bargaining gave immense amusement to the crowd that collected round him.

I was surprised to notice that several women who professed to know no English could make themselves understood without difficulty when it pleased them.

‘The rings is too dear at you, sir,’ said one girl, using the Gaelic construction ; ‘let you put less money on them, and all the girls will be buying.’

After the jewellery he displayed some cheap religious pictures—abominable oleographs—but I did not see many buyers.

I am told that most of the pedlars who come

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here are Germans or Poles ; but I did not have occasion to speak with this man by himself.

I have come over for a few days to the south island, and, as usual, my voyage was not favourable.

The morning was fine, and seemed to promise one of the peculiarly hushed, pellucid days that occur sometimes before rain in early winter. From the first gleam of dawn the sky was covered with white cloud, and the tranquillity was so complete that every sound seemed to float away by itself across the silence of the bay. Lines of blue smoke were going up in spirals over the village, and further off heavy fragments of rain-cloud were lying on the horizon. We started early in the day ; and, although the sea looked calm from a distance, we met a considerable roll coming from the south-west when we got out from the shore.

Near the middle of the sound the man who was rowing in the bow broke his oar-pin, and the proper management of the curagh became a matter of some difficulty. We had only a three-oared curagh, and if the sea had gone much higher we should have run a good deal of danger. Our progress was so slow that clouds came up with a rise in the wind before we reached the shore, and rain began to fall in large

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single drops. The black curagh working slowly through this world of grey, and the soft hissing of the rain, gave me one of the moods in which we realize with immense distress the short moment we have left us to experience all the wonder and beauty of the world.

The approach to the south island is made at a fine sandy beach on the north-west. This interval in the rocks is of great service to the people; but the tract of wet sand with a few hideous fishermen's houses, lately built on it, looks singularly desolate in broken weather.

The tide was going out when we landed, so we merely stranded the curagh and went up to the little hotel. The cess-collector was at work in one of the rooms, and there were a number of men and boys waiting about, who stared at us while we stood at the door and talked to the proprietor.

When we had had our drink I went down to the sea with my men, who were in a hurry to be off. Some time was spent in replacing the oar-pin, and then they set out, though the wind was still increasing. A good many fishermen came down to see the start, and long after the curagh was out of sight I stood and talked with them in Irish, as I was anxious to compare their language and temperament with what I knew of the other island.

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The language seems to be identical, though some of these men speak rather more distinctly than any Irish speakers I have yet heard. In physical type, dress, and general character, however, there seems to be a considerable difference. The people on this island are more advanced than their neighbours, and the families here are gradually forming into different ranks, made up of the well-to-do, the struggling, and the quite poor and thriftless. These distinctions are present in the middle island also ; but over there they have had no effect on the people, among whom there is still absolute equality.

A little later the steamer came in sight and lay to in the offing. While the curaghs were being put out I noticed in the crowd several men of the ragged, humorous type that was once thought to represent the real peasant of Ireland. Rain was now falling heavily, and as we looked out through the fog there was something nearly appalling in the shrieks of laughter kept up by one of these individuals, a man of extraordinary ugliness and wit.

At last he moved off toward the houses, wiping his eyes with the tail of his coat and moaning to himself 'Tá mé marbh' ('I'm killed'), till some one stopped him, and he began again pouring out a medley of rude puns and jokes that meant more than they said.

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There is quaint humour, and sometimes wild humour, on the middle island, but never this half-sensual ecstasy of laughter. Perhaps a man must have a sense of intimate misery, not known there, before he can set himself to jeer and mock at the world. These strange men with receding foreheads, high cheek-bones, and ungovernable eyes seem to represent some old type found on these few acres at the extreme border of Europe, where it is only in wild jests and laughter that they can express their loneliness and desolation.

The mode of reciting ballads in this island is singularly harsh. I fell in with a curious man to-day beyond the east village, and we wandered out on the rocks towards the sea. A wintry shower came on while we were together, and we crouched down in the bracken, under a loose wall. When we had gone through the usual topics he asked me if I was fond of songs, and began singing to show what he could do.

The music was much like what I have heard before on the islands—a monotonous chant with pauses on the high and low notes to mark the rhythm ; but the harsh nasal tone in which he sang was almost intolerable. His performance reminded me, in general effect, of a chant I once heard from a party of Orientals I was travelling with in a third-class carriage from Paris to

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Dieppe, but the islander ran his voice over a much wider range.

His pronunciation was lost in the rasping of his throat, and, though he shrieked into my ear to make sure that I understood him above the howling of the wind, I could only make out that it was an endless ballad telling the fortune of a young man who went to sea, and had many adventures. The English nautical terms were employed continually in describing his life on the ship, but the man seemed to feel that they were not in their place, and stopped short when one of them occurred to give me a poke with his finger and explain jib, topsail, and bowsprit, which were for me the most intelligible features of the poem. Again, when the scene changed to Dublin, 'glass of whisky,' 'public-house,' and such things were in English.

When the shower was over he showed me a curious cave hidden among the cliffs, a short distance from the sea. On our way back he asked me the three questions I am met with on every side—whether I am a rich man, whether I am married, and whether I have ever seen a poorer place than these islands.

When he heard that I was not married he urged me to come back in the summer so that he might take me over in a curagh to the Spa in County Clare, where there is 'spree mor agus

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go leor ladies' ('a big spree and plenty of ladies').

Something about the man repelled me while I was with him, and though I was cordial and liberal he seemed to feel that I abhorred him. We arranged to meet again in the evening, but when I dragged myself with an inexplicable loathing to the place of meeting, there was no trace of him.

It is characteristic that this man—who is probably a drunkard and shebeener and certainly in penury—refused the chance of a shilling because he felt that I did not like him. He had a curiously mixed expression of hardness and melancholy. Probably his character has given him a bad reputation on the island, and he lives here with the restlessness of a man who has no sympathy with his companions.

I have come over again to Inishmaan, and this time I had fine weather for my passage. The air was full of luminous sunshine from the early morning, and it was almost a summer's day when I set sail at noon with Michael and two other men who had come over for me in a curagh.

The wind was in our favour, so the sail was put up and Michael sat in the stern to steer with an oar, while I rowed with the others.

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We had had a good dinner and drink, and were wrought up by this sudden revival of summer to a dreamy voluptuous gaiety that made us shout with exultation to hear our voices passing out across the blue twinkling of the sea.

Even after the people of the south island, these men of the Inishmaan seemed to be moved by strange archaic sympathies with the world. Their mood accorded itself with wonderful fineness to the suggestions of the day, and their ancient Gaelic seemed so full of divine simplicity that I would have liked to turn the prow to the west and row with them for ever.

I told them I was going back to Paris in a few days to sell my books and my bed, and that then I was coming back to grow as strong and simple as they were among the islands of the west.

When our excitement sobered down, Michael told me that one of the priests had left his gun at our cottage and given me leave to use it till he returned to the island. There was another gun and a ferret in the house also, and he said that as soon as we got home he was going to take me out fowling on rabbits.

A little later in the day we set off, and I nearly laughed to see Michael's eagerness that I should turn out a good shot.

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We put the ferret down in a crevice between two bare sheets of rock, and waited. In a few minutes we heard rushing paws underneath us, then a rabbit shot up straight into the air from the crevice at our feet and set off for a wall that was a few feet away. I threw up the gun and fired.

‘Buail tu é,’ screamed Michael at my elbow as he ran up the rock. I had killed it.

We shot seven or eight more in the next hour, and Michael was immensely pleased. If I had done badly I think I should have had to leave the islands. The people would have despised me. A ‘duine uasal’ who cannot shoot seems to these descendants of hunters a fallen type who is worse than an apostate.

The women of this island are before conventionality, and share some of the liberal features that are thought peculiar to the women of Paris and New York.

Many of them are too contented and too sturdy to have more than a decorative interest, but there are others full of curious individuality.

This year I have got to know a wonderfully humorous girl, who has been spinning in the kitchen for the last few days with the old woman’s spinning-wheel. The morning she began I heard her exquisite intonation almost

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before I awoke, brooding and cooing over every syllable she uttered.

I have heard something similar in the voices of German and Polish women, but I do not think men—at least European men—who are always further than women from the simple, animal emotions, or any speakers who use languages with weak gutturals, like French or English, can produce this inarticulate chant in their ordinary talk.

She plays continual tricks with her Gaelic in the way girls are fond of, piling up diminutives and repeating adjectives with a humorous scorn of syntax. While she is here the talk never stops in the kitchen. To-day she has been asking me many questions about Germany, for it seems one of her sisters married a German husband in America some years ago, who kept her in great comfort, with a fine 'capull glas' ('grey horse') to ride on, and this girl has decided to escape in the same way from the drudgery of the island.

This was my last evening on my stool in the chimney corner, and I had a long talk with some neighbours who came in to bid me prosperity, and lay about on the floor with their heads on low stools and their feet stretched out to the embers of the turf. The old woman was at the other side of the fire, and the girl I have

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spoken of was standing at her spinning-wheel, talking and joking with everyone. She says when I go away now I am to marry a rich wife with plenty of money, and if she dies on me I am to come back here and marry herself for my second wife.

I have never heard talk so simple and so attractive as the talk of these people. This evening they began disputing about their wives, and it appeared that the greatest merit they see in a woman is that she should be fruitful and bring them many children. As no money can be earned by children on the island this one attitude shows the immense difference between these people and the people of Paris.

The direct sexual instincts are not weak on the island, but they are so subordinated to the instincts of the family that they rarely lead to irregularity. The life here is still at an almost patriarchal stage, and the people are nearly as far from the romantic moods of love as they are from the impulsive life of the savage.

The wind was so high this morning that there was some doubt whether the steamer would arrive, and I spent half the day wandering about with Michael watching the horizon.

At last, when we had given her up, she came in sight far away to the north, where she had

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gone to have the wind with her where the sea was at its highest.

I got my baggage from the cottage and set off for the slip with Michael and the old man, turning into a cottage here and there to say good-bye.

In spite of the wind outside, the sea at the slip was as calm as a pool. The men who were standing about while the steamer was at the south island wondered for the last time whether I would be married when I came back to see them. Then we pulled out and took our place in the line. As the tide was running hard the steamer stopped a certain distance from the shore, and gave us a long race for good places at her side. In the struggle we did not come off well, so I had to clamber across two curaghs, twisting and fumbling with the roll, in order to get on board.

It seemed strange to see the curaghs full of well-known faces turning back to the slip without me, but the roll in the sound soon took off my attention. Some men were on board whom I had seen on the south island, and a good many Kilronan people on their way home from Galway, who told me that in one part of their passage in the morning they had come in for heavy seas.

As is usual on Saturday, the steamer had a large cargo of flour and porter to discharge at

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Kilronan, and, as it was nearly four o'clock before the tide could float her at the pier, I felt some doubt about our passage to Galway.

The wind increased as the afternoon went on, and when I came down in the twilight I found that the cargo was not yet all unladen, and that the captain feared to face the gale that was rising. It was some time before he came to a final decision, and we walked backwards and forwards from the village with heavy clouds flying overhead and the wind howling in the walls. At last he telegraphed to Galway to know if he was wanted the next day, and we went into a public-house to wait for the reply.

The kitchen was filled with men sitting closely on long forms ranged in lines at each side of the fire. A wild-looking but beautiful girl was kneeling on the hearth talking loudly to the men, and a few natives of Inishmaan were hanging about the door, miserably drunk. At the end of the kitchen the bar was arranged, with a sort of alcove beside it, where some older men were playing cards. Overhead there were the open rafters, filled with turf and tobacco smoke.

This is the haunt so much dreaded by the women of the other islands, where the men linger with their money till they go out at last with reeling steps and are lost in the sound.

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Without this background of empty curaghs, and bodies floating naked with the tide, there would be something almost absurd about the dissipation of this simple place where men sit, evening after evening, drinking bad whisky and porter, and talking with endless repetition of fishing, and kelp, and of the sorrows of purgatory.

When we had finished our whisky word came that the boat might remain.

With some difficulty I got my bags out of the steamer and carried them up through the crowd of women and donkeys that were still struggling on the quay in an inconceivable medley of flour-bags and cases of petroleum. When I reached the inn the old woman was in great good humour, and I spent some time talking by the kitchen fire. Then I groped my way back to the harbour, where, I was told, the old net-mender, who came to see me on my first visit to the islands, was spending the night as watchman.

It was quite dark on the pier, and a terrible gale was blowing. There was no one in the little office where I expected to find him, so I groped my way further on towards a figure I saw moving with a lantern.

It was the old man, and he remembered me at once when I hailed him and told him who I was. He spent some time arranging one of his

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lanterns, and then he took me back to his office—a mere shed of planks and corrugated iron, put up for the contractor of some work which is in progress on the pier.

When we reached the light I saw that his head was rolled up in an extraordinary collection of mufflers to keep him from the cold, and that his face was much older than when I saw him before, though still full of intelligence.

He began to tell how he had gone to see a relative of mine in Dublin when he first left the island as a cabin-boy, between forty and fifty years ago.

He told his story with the usual detail :

We saw a man walking about on the quay in Dublin, and looking at us without saying a word. Then he came down to the yacht.

‘Are you the men from Aran?’ said he.

‘We are,’ said we.

‘You’re to come with me so,’ said he.

‘Why?’ said we.

Then he told us it was Mr. Synge had sent him, and we went with him. Mr. Synge brought us into his kitchen and gave the men a glass of whisky all round, and a half-glass to me because I was a boy—though at that time and to this day I can drink as much as two men and not be the worse of it. We were some time in

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the kitchen ; then one of the men said we should be going. I said it would not be right to go without saying a word to Mr. Synge. Then the servant-girl went up and brought him down, and he gave us another glass of whisky, and he gave me a book in Irish because I was going to sea, and I was able to read in the Irish.

I owe it to Mr. Synge and that book that when I came back here, after not hearing a word of Irish for thirty years, I had as good Irish, or maybe better Irish, than any person on the island.

I could see all through his talk that the sense of superiority, which his scholarship in this little-known language gave him above the ordinary seaman, had influenced his whole personality, and been the central interest of his life.

On one voyage he had a fellow-sailor who often boasted that he had been at school and learned Greek, and this incident took place :

One night we had a quarrel, and I asked him could he read a Greek book with all his talk of it.

‘I can so,’ said he.

‘We’ll see that,’ said I.

Then I got the Irish book out of my chest, and I gave it into his hand.

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‘Read that to me,’ said I, ‘if you know Greek.’

He took it, and he looked at it this way, and that way, and not a bit of him could make it out.

‘Bedad, I’ve forgotten my Greek,’ said he.

‘You’re telling a lie,’ said I.

‘I’m not,’ said he; ‘it’s the divil a bit I can read it.’

Then I took the book back into my hand, and said to him—

‘It’s the sorra a word of Greek you ever knew in your life, for there’s not a word of Greek in that book, and not a bit of you knew.’

He told me another story of the only time he had heard Irish spoken during his voyages:

One night I was in New York, walking in the streets with some other men, and we came upon two women quarrelling in Irish at the door of a public-house.

‘What’s that jargon?’ said one of the men.

‘It’s no jargon,’ said I.

‘What is it?’ said he.

‘It’s Irish,’ said I.

Then I went up to them, and you know, sir, there is no language like the Irish for soothing and quieting. The moment I spoke to them

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they stopped scratching and swearing and stood there as quiet as two lambs.

Then they asked me in Irish if I wouldn't come in and have a drink, and I said I couldn't leave my mates.

'Bring them too,' said they.

Then we all had a drop together.

While we were talking another man had slipped in and sat down in the corner with his pipe, and the rain had become so heavy we could hardly hear our voices over the noise on the iron roof.

The old man went on telling of his experiences at sea and the places he had been to.

'If I had my life to live over again,' he said, 'there is no other way I'd spend it. I went in and out everywhere and saw everything. I was never afraid to take my glass, though I was never drunk in my life, and I was a great player of cards, though I never played for money.'

'There's no diversion at all in cards if you don't play for money,' said the man in the corner.

'There was no use in my playing for money,' said the old man, 'for I'd always lose, and what's the use in playing if you always lose?'

Then our conversation branched off to the Irish language and the books written in it.

He began to criticize Archbishop MacHale's

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version of *Moore's Irish Melodies* with great severity and acuteness, citing whole poems both in the English and Irish, and then giving versions that he had made himself.

‘A translation is no translation,’ he said, ‘unless it will give you the music of a poem along with the words of it. In my translation you won’t find a foot or a syllable that’s not in the English, yet I’ve put down all his words mean, and nothing but it. Archbishop MacHale’s work is a most miserable production.’

From the verses he cited his judgment seemed perfectly justified, and even if he was wrong, it is interesting to note that this poor sailor and night-watchman was ready to rise up and criticize an eminent dignitary and scholar on rather delicate points of versification and the finer distinctions between old words of Gaelic.

In spite of his singular intelligence and minute observation his reasoning was mediæval.

I asked him what he thought about the future of the language on these islands.

‘It can never die out,’ said he, ‘because there’s no family in the place can live without a bit of a field for potatoes, and they have only the Irish words for all that they do in the fields. They sail their new boats—their hookers—in English, but they sail a curagh oftener in Irish, and in the fields they have the Irish alone. It

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can never die out, and when the people begin to see it fallen very low, it will rise up again like the phoenix from its own ashes.'

'And the Gaelic League?' I asked him.

'The Gaelic League! Didn't they come down here with their organisers and their secretaries, and their meetings and their speechifyings, and start a branch of it, and teach a power of Irish for five weeks and a half!'¹

'What do we want here with their teaching Irish?' said the man in the corner; 'haven't we Irish enough?'

'You have not,' said the old man; 'there's not a soul in Aran can count up to nine hundred and ninety-nine without using an English word but myself.'

It was getting late, and the rain had lessened for a moment, so I groped my way back to the inn through the intense darkness of a late autumn night.

¹ This was written, it should be remembered, some years ago.

PART IV

No two journeys to these islands are alike. This morning I sailed with the steamer a little after five o'clock in a cold night air, with the stars shining on the bay. A number of Claddagh fishermen had been out all night fishing not far from the harbour, and without thinking, or perhaps caring to think, of the steamer, they had put out their nets in the channel where she was to pass. Just before we started the mate sounded the steam whistle repeatedly to give them warning, saying as he did so :

‘If you were out now in the bay, gentlemen, you’d hear some fine prayers being said.’

When we had gone a little way we began to see the light from the turf-fires carried by the fishermen flickering on the water, and to hear a faint noise of angry voices. Then the outline of a large fishing-boat came in sight through the darkness, with the forms of three men who stood on the deck shrieking and howling at us to alter our course. The captain feared to turn aside, as there are sandbanks near the channel ; so the engines were stopped, and we glided over the nets without doing them harm. As we passed close to the boat the crew could be seen

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plainly on the deck, one of them holding the bucket of red turf, and their abuse could be distinctly heard. It changed continually, from profuse Gaelic maledictions to the simpler curses they know in English. As they spoke they could be seen writhing and twisting themselves with passion against the light which was beginning to turn on the ripple of the sea. Soon afterwards another set of voices began in front of us, breaking out in strange contrast with the dwindling stars and the silence of the dawn.

Further on we passed many boats that let us go by without a word, as their nets were not in the channel. Then day came on rapidly, with cold showers that turned golden in the first rays from the sun, filling the troughs of the sea with curious transparencies and light.

This year I have brought my fiddle with me so that I may have something new to keep up the interest of the people. I have played for them several tunes ; but as far as I can judge they do not feel modern music, though they listen eagerly from curiosity. Irish airs like 'Eileen Aroon' please them better ; but it is only when I play some jig like the 'Black Rogue'—which is known on the island—that they seem to respond to the full meaning of the notes. Last night I played for a large crowd,

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which had come together for another purpose from all parts of the island.

About six o'clock I was going into the schoolmaster's house, and I heard a fierce wrangle going on between a man and a woman near the cottages to the west, that lie below the road. While I was listening to them several women came down to listen also from behind the wall, and told me that the people who were fighting were near relations who lived side by side and often quarrelled about trifles, though they were as good friends as ever the next day. The voices sounded so enraged that I thought mischief would come of it, but the women laughed at the idea. Then a lull came, and I said that they seemed to have finished at last.

'Finished!' said one of the women; 'sure they haven't rightly begun. It's only playing they are yet.'

It was just after sunset, and the evening was bitterly cold, so I went into the house and left them.

An hour later the old man came down from my cottage to say that some of the lads and the 'fear lionta' ('the man of the nets'—a young man from Aranmor who is teaching net-mending to the boys) were up at the house, and had sent him down to tell me they would like to dance, if I would come up and play for them.

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I went out at once, and as soon as I came into the air I heard the dispute going on still to the west more violently than ever. The news of it had gone about the island, and little bands of girls and boys were running along the lanes towards the scene of the quarrel as eagerly as if they were going to a racecourse.

I stopped for a few minutes at the door of our cottage to listen to the volume of abuse that was rising across the stillness of the island. Then I went into the kitchen and began tuning the fiddle, as the boys were impatient for my music. At first I tried to play standing, but on the upward stroke my bow came in contact with the salt fish and oilskins that hung from the rafters; so I settled myself at last on a table in the corner, where I was out of the way, and got one of the people to hold up my music before me, as I had no stand. I played a French melody first, to get myself used to the people and the qualities of the room, which has little resonance between the earth floor and the thatch overhead. Then I struck up the 'Black Rogue,' and in a moment a tall man bounded out from his stool under the chimney and began flying round the kitchen with peculiarly sure and graceful bravado.

The lightness of the pampooties seems to make the dancing on this island lighter and swifter than anything I have seen on the mainland, and

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the simplicity of the men enables them to throw a naïve extravagance into their steps that is impossible in places where the people are self-conscious.

The speed, however, was so violent that I had some difficulty in keeping up, as my fingers were not in practice, and I could not take off more than a small part of my attention to watch what was going on. When I finished I heard a commotion at the door, and the whole body of people who had gone down to watch the quarrel filed into the kitchen and arranged themselves around the walls, the women and girls, as is usual, forming themselves in one compact mass, crouching on their heels near the door.

I struck up another dance—‘Paddy Get Up’—and the ‘fear lionta’ and the first dancer went through it together, with additional rapidity and grace, as they were excited by the presence of the people who had come in. Then word went round that an old man, known as ‘Little Roger,’ was outside, and they told me he was once the best dancer on the island.

For a long time he refused to come in, for he said he was too old to dance, but at last he was persuaded, and the people brought him in and gave him a stool opposite me. It was some time longer before he would take his turn, and

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when he did so, though he was met with great clapping of hands, he only danced for a few moments. He did not know the dances in my book, he said, and did not care to dance to music he was not familiar with. When the people pressed him again he looked across to me.

‘John,’ he said, in shaking English, ‘have you got “Larry Grogan,” for it is an agreeable air?’

I had not, so some of the young men danced again to the ‘Black Rogue,’ and then the party broke up. The altercation was still going on at the cottage below us, and the people were anxious to see what was coming of it.

About ten o’clock a young man came in and told us that the fight was over.

‘They have been at it for four hours,’ he said, ‘and now they’re tired. Indeed it is time they were, for you’d rather be listening to a man killing a pig than to the noise they were letting out of them.’

After the dancing and excitement we were too stirred up to be sleepy, so we sat for a long time round the embers of the turf, talking and smoking by the light of a candle.

From ordinary music we came to talk of the music of the fairies, and they told me this story, when I had told them some stories of my own :

A man who lives in the other end of the

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village got his gun one day and went out to look for rabbits in a thicket near the small dun. He saw a rabbit sitting up under a tree, and he lifted his gun to take aim at it, but just as he had it covered he heard a kind of music over his head, and he looked up into the sky. When he looked back for the rabbit, not a bit of it was to be seen.

He went on after that, and he heard the music again.

Then he looked over a wall, and he saw a rabbit sitting up by the wall with a sort of flute in its mouth, and it playing on it with its two fingers !

‘What sort of a rabbit was that?’ said the old woman when they had finished. ‘How could that be a right rabbit? I remember old Pat Dirane used to be telling us he was once out on the cliffs, and he saw a big rabbit sitting down in a hole under a flagstone. He called a man who was with him, and they put a hook on the end of a stick and ran it down into the hole. Then a voice called up to them :

“Ah, Phaddrick, don’t hurt me with the hook !”’

‘Pat was a great rogue,’ said the old man. ‘Maybe you remember the bits of horns he had like handles on the end of his sticks? Well,

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one day there was a priest over and he said to Pat :

““Is it the devil's horns you have on your sticks, Pat ?””

““I don't rightly know,” said Pat, “but if it is, it's the devil's milk you've been drinking since you've been able to drink, and the devil's flesh you've been eating, and the devil's butter you've been putting on your bread, for I've seen the like of them horns on every old cow through the country.””

The weather has been rough, but early this afternoon the sea was calm enough for a hooker to come in with turf from Connemara, though while she was at the pier the roll was so great that the men had to keep a watch on the waves and loosen the cable whenever a large one was coming in, so that she might ease up with the water.

There were only two men on board, and when she was empty they had some trouble in dragging in the cables, hoisting the sails, and getting out of the harbour before they could be blown on the rocks.

A heavy shower came on soon afterwards, and I lay down under a stack of turf with some people who were standing about, to wait for another hooker that was coming in with horses.

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They began talking and laughing about the dispute last night and the noise made at it.

‘The worst fights do be made here over nothing,’ said an old man next me. ‘Did Mourteen or any of them on the big island ever tell you of the fight they had there threescore years ago, when they were killing each other with knives out on the strand?’

‘They never told me,’ I said.

‘Well,’ said he, ‘they were going down to cut weed, and a man was sharpening his knife on a stone before he went. A young boy came into the kitchen and he said to the man :

“What are you sharpening that knife for?”

“To kill your father with,” said the man, and they the best of friends all the time. The young boy went back to his house and told his father there was a man sharpening a knife to kill him.

“Bedad,” said the father, “if he has a knife I’ll have one too.”

‘He sharpened his knife after that, and they went down to the strand. Then the two men began making fun about their knives, and from that they began raising their voices, and it wasn’t long before there were ten men fighting with their knives, and they never stopped till there were five of them dead.

‘They buried them the day after, and when

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they were coming home, what did they see but the boy who began the work playing about with the son of the other man, and their two fathers down in their graves.'

When he stopped, a gust of wind came and blew up a bundle of dry seaweed that was near us, right over our heads.

Another old man began to talk.

'That was a great wind,' he said. 'I remember one time there was a man in the south island who had a lot of wool up in shelter against the corner of a wall. He was after washing it, and drying it, and turning it, and he had it all nice and clean the way they could card it. Then a wind came down and the wool began blowing all over the wall. The man was throwing out his arms on it and trying to stop it, and another man saw him.

"The devil mend your head!" says he, "the like of that wind is too strong for you."

"If the devil himself is in it," said the other man, "I'll hold on to it while I can."

'Then whether it was because of the word or not I don't know, but the whole of the wool went up over his head and blew all over the island, yet, when his wife came to spin afterwards she had all they expected, as if that lot was not lost on them at all.'

'There was more than that in it,' said another

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man, 'for the night before a woman had a great sight out to the west in this island, and saw all the people that were dead a while back in this island and the south island, and they all talking with each other. There was a man over from the other island that night, and he heard the woman talking of what she had seen. The next day he went back to the south island, and I think he was alone in the curagh. As soon as he came near the other island he saw a man fishing from the cliffs, and this man called out to him :

““Make haste now and go up and tell your mother to hide the poteen”—his mother used to sell poteen—“for I’m after seeing the biggest party of peelers and yeomanry passing by on the rocks was ever seen on the island.” It was at that time the wool was taken with the other man above, under the hill, and no peelers in the island at all.’

A little after that the old men went away, and I was left with some young men between twenty and thirty, who talked to me of different things. One of them asked me if ever I was drunk, and another told me I would be right to marry a girl out of this island, for they were nice women in it, fine fat girls, who would be strong, and have plenty of children, and not be wasting my money on me.

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When the horses were coming ashore a curagh that was far out after lobster-pots came hurrying in, and a man out of her ran up the sandhills to meet a little girl who was coming down with a bundle of Sunday clothes. He changed them on the sand and then went out to the hooker, and went off to Connemara to bring back his horses.

A young married woman I used often to talk with is dying of a fever—typhus, I am told—and her husband and brothers have gone off in a curagh to get the doctor and the priest from the north island, though the sea is rough.

I watched them from the dun for a long time after they had started. Wind and rain were driving through the sound, and I could see no boats or people anywhere except this one black curagh splashing and struggling through the waves. When the wind fell a little I could hear people hammering below me to the east. The body of a young man who was drowned a few weeks ago came ashore this morning, and his friends have been busy all day making a coffin in the yard of the house where he lived.

After a while the curagh went out of sight into the mist, and I came down to the cottage shuddering with cold and misery.

The old woman was keening by the fire.

‘I have been to the house where the young

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man is,' she said, 'but I couldn't go to the door with the air was coming out of it. They say his head isn't on him at all, and indeed it isn't any wonder and he three weeks in the sea. Isn't it great danger and sorrow is over everyone on this island?'

I asked her if the curagh would soon be coming back with the priest.

'It will not be coming soon or at all to-night,' she said. 'The wind has gone up now, and there will come no curagh to this island for maybe two days or three. And wasn't it a cruel thing to see the haste was on them, and they in danger all the time to be drowned themselves?'

Then I asked her how the woman was doing.

'She's nearly lost,' said the old woman; 'she won't be alive at all to-morrow morning. They have no boards to make her a coffin, and they'll want to borrow the boards that a man below has had this two years to bury his mother, and she alive still. I heard them saying there are two more women with the fever, and a child that's not three. The Lord have mercy on us all!'

I went out again to look over the sea, but night had fallen and the hurricane was howling over the dun. I walked down the lane and heard the keening in the house where the young man was. Further on I could see a stir about

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the door of the cottage that had been last struck by typhus. Then I turned back again in the teeth of the rain, and sat over the fire with the old man and woman talking of the sorrows of the people till it was late in the night.

This evening the old man told me a story he had heard long ago on the mainland :

There was a young woman, he said, and she had a child. In a little time the woman died and they buried her the day after. That night another woman—a woman of the family—was sitting by the fire with the child on her lap, giving milk to it out of a cup. Then the woman they were after burying opened the door, and came into the house. She went over to the fire, and she took a stool and sat down before the other woman. Then she put out her hand and took the child on her lap, and gave it her breast. After that she put the child in the cradle and went over to the dresser and took milk and potatoes off it, and ate them. Then she went out. The other woman was frightened, and she told the man of the house when he came back, and two young men. They said they would be there the next night, and if she came back they would catch hold of her. She came the next night and gave the child her

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breast, and when she got up to go to the dresser, the man of the house caught hold of her, but he fell down on the floor. Then the two young men caught hold of her and they held her. She told them she was away with the fairies, and they could not keep her that night, though she was eating no food with the fairies, the way she might be able to come back to her child. Then she told them they would all be leaving that part of the country on the Oidhche Shamhna, and that there would be four or five hundred of them riding on horses, and herself would be on a grey horse, riding behind a young man. And she told them to go down to a bridge they would be crossing that night, and to wait at the head of it, and when she would be coming up she would slow the horse and they would be able to throw something on her and on the young man, and they would fall over on the ground and be saved.

She went away then, and on the Oidhche Shamhna the men went down and got her back. She had four children after that, and in the end she died.

It was not herself they buried at all the first time, but some old thing the fairies put in her place.

‘There are people who say they don’t believe

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in these things,' said the old woman, 'but there are strange things, let them say what they will. There was a woman went to bed at the lower village a while ago, and her child along with her. For a time they did not sleep, and then something came to the window, and they heard a voice and this is what it said :

“It is time to sleep from this out.”

‘In the morning the child was dead, and indeed it is many get their death that way on the island.’

The young man has been buried, and his funeral was one of the strangest scenes I have met with. People could be seen going down to his house from early in the day, yet when I went there with the old man about the middle of the afternoon, the coffin was still lying in front of the door, with the men and women of the family standing round beating it, and keening over it, in a great crowd of people. A little later every one knelt down and a last prayer was said. Then the cousins of the dead man got ready two oars and some pieces of rope—the men of his own family seemed too broken with grief to know what they were doing—the coffin was tied up, and the procession began. The old women walked close behind the coffin, and I happened to take a

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place just after them, among the first of the men. The rough lane to the graveyard slopes away towards the east, and the crowd of women going down before me in their red dresses, cloaked with red petticoats, with the waistband that is held round the head just seen from behind, had a strange effect, to which the white coffin and the unity of colour gave a nearly cloistral quietness.

This time the graveyard was filled with withered grass and bracken instead of the early ferns that were to be seen everywhere at the other funeral I have spoken of, and the grief of the people was of a different kind, as they had come to bury a young man who had died in his first manhood, instead of an old woman of eighty. For this reason the keen lost a part of its formal nature, and was recited as the expression of intense personal grief by the young men and women of the man's own family.

When the coffin had been laid down near the grave that was to be opened, two long switches were cut out from the brambles among the rocks, and the length and breadth of the coffin were marked on them. Then the men began their work, clearing off stones and thin layers of earth, and breaking up an old coffin that was in the place into which the new one had to be lowered. When a number of blackened boards and pieces

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of bone had been thrown up with the clay, a skull was lifted out and placed upon a grave-stone. Immediately the old woman, the mother of the dead man, took it up in her hands, and carried it away by herself. Then she sat down and put it in her lap—it was the skull of her own mother—and began keening and shrieking over it with the wildest lamentation.

As the pile of mouldering clay got higher beside the grave a heavy smell began to rise from it, and the men hurried with their work, measuring the hole repeatedly with the two rods of bramble. When it was nearly deep enough the old woman got up and came back to the coffin, and began to beat on it, holding the skull in her left hand. This last moment of grief was the most terrible of all. The young women were nearly lying among the stones, worn out with their passion of grief, yet raising themselves every few moments to beat with magnificent gestures on the boards of the coffin. The young men were worn out also, and their voices cracked continually in the wail of the keen.

When everything was ready the sheet was unpinned from the coffin, and it was lowered into its place. Then an old man took a wooden vessel with holy water in it, and a wisp of bracken, and the people crowded round him while he splashed the water over them. They

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seemed eager to get as much of it as possible, more than one old woman crying out with a humorous voice :

‘Tabhair dham braon eile, a Mhourteen’
('Give me another drop, Martin').

When the grave was half filled in, I wandered round towards the north watching two seals that were chasing each other near the surf. I reached the Sandy Head as the light began to fail, and found some of the men I knew best fishing there with a sort of drag-net. It is a tedious process, and I sat for a long time on the sand watching the net being put out, and then drawn in again by eight men working together with a slow rhythmical movement.

As they talked to me and gave me a little poteen and a little bread when they thought I was hungry, I could not help feeling that I was talking with men who were under a judgment of death. I knew that every one of them would be drowned in the sea in a few years and battered naked on the rocks, or would die in his own cottage and be buried with another fearful scene in the graveyard I had come from.

When I got up this morning I found that the people had gone to Mass and latched the kitchen door from the outside, so that I could not open it to give myself light.

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I sat for nearly an hour beside the fire with a curious feeling that I should be quite alone in this little cottage. I am so used to sitting here with the people that I have never felt the room before as a place where any man might live and work by himself. After a while as I waited, with just light enough from the chimney to let me see the rafters and the greyness of the walls, I became indescribably mournful, for I felt that this little corner on the face of the world, and the people who live in it, have a peace and dignity from which we are shut out for ever.

While I was dreaming, the old woman came in, in a great hurry, and made tea for me and the young priest, who followed her a little later drenched with rain and spray.

The curate who has charge of the middle and south islands has a wearisome and dangerous task. He comes to this island or Inishere on Saturday night—whenever the sea is calm enough—and has Mass the first thing on Sunday morning. Then he goes down fasting and is rowed across to the other island and has Mass again, so that it is about mid-day when he gets a hurried breakfast before he sets off again for Aranmor, meeting often on both passages a rough and perilous sea.

A couple of Sundays ago I was lying outside the cottage in the sunshine smoking my pipe,

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when the curate, a man of the greatest kindness and humour, came up, wet and worn out, to have his first meal. He looked at me for a moment and then shook his head.

‘Tell me,’ he said, ‘did you read your Bible this morning?’

I answered that I had not done so.

‘Well, begob, Mr. Synge,’ he went on, ‘if you ever go to Heaven, you’ll have a great laugh at us.’

Although these people are kindly towards each other and to their children, they have no feeling for the sufferings of animals, and little sympathy for pain when the person who feels it is not in danger. I have sometimes seen a girl writhing and howling with toothache while her mother sat at the other side of the fireplace pointing at her and laughing at her as if amused by the sight.

A few days ago, when we had been talking of the death of President M‘Kinley, I explained the American way of killing murderers, and a man asked me how long the man who killed the President would be dying.

‘While you’d be snapping your fingers,’ I said.

‘Well,’ said the man, ‘they might as well hang him so, and not be bothering themselves with all them wires. A man who would kill a

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king or a president knows he has to die for it, and it's only giving him the thing he bargained for if he dies easy. It would be right he should be three weeks dying, and there'd be fewer of those things done in the world.'

If two dogs fight at the slip when we are waiting for the steamer, the men are delighted and do all they can to keep up the fury of the battle.

They tie down donkeys' heads to their hoofs to keep them from straying, in a way that must cause horrible pain, and sometimes when I go into a cottage I find all the women of the place down on their knees plucking the feathers from live ducks and geese.

When the people are in pain themselves they make no attempt to hide or control their feelings. An old man who was ill in the winter took me out the other day to show me how far down the road they could hear him yelling 'the time he had a pain in his head.'

There was a great storm this morning, and I went up on the cliffs to sit in the shanty they have made there for the men who watch for wrack. Soon afterwards a boy, who was out minding sheep, came up from the west, and we had a long talk.

He began by giving me the first connected account I have had of the accident that happened

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some time ago, when the young man was drowned on his way to the south island.

‘Some men from the south island,’ he said, ‘came over and bought some horses on this island, and they put them in a hooker to take across. They wanted a curagh to go with them to tow the horses on to the strand, and a young man said he would go, and they could give him a rope and tow him behind the hooker. When they were out in the sound a wind came down on them, and the man in the curagh couldn’t turn her to meet the waves, because the hooker was pulling her and she began filling up with water.

‘When the men in the hooker saw it they began crying out one thing and another thing without knowing what to do. One man called out to the man who was holding the rope: “Let go the rope now, or you’ll swamp her.”

‘And the man with the rope threw it out on the water, and the curagh half-filled already, and I think only one oar in her. A wave came into her then, and she went down before them, and the young man began swimming about; then they let fall the sails in the hooker the way they could pick him up. And when they had them down they were too far off, and they pulled the sails up again the way they could tack back to him. He was there in the water swimming

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round, and swimming round, and before they got up with him again he sank the third time, and they didn't see any more of him.'

I asked if anyone had seen him on the island since he was dead.

'They have not,' he said, 'but there were queer things in it. Before he went out on the sea that day his dog came up and sat beside him on the rocks, and began crying. When the horses were coming down to the slip an old woman saw her son, that was drowned a while ago, riding on one of them. She didn't say what she was after seeing, and this man caught the horse, he caught his own horse first, and then he caught this one, and after that he went out and was drowned. Two days after I dreamed they found him on the "Ceann gaine"' (the Sandy Head) 'and carried him up to the house on the plain, and took his pampooties off him and hung them up on a nail to dry. It was there they found him afterwards, as you'll have heard them say.'

'Are you always afraid when you hear a dog crying?' I said.

'We don't like it,' he answered; 'you will often see them on the top of the rocks looking up into the heavens, and they crying. We don't like it at all, and we don't like a cock or hen to break anything in a house, for we know

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then some one will be going away. A while before the man who used to live in that cottage below died in the winter, the cock belonging to his wife began to fight with another cock. The two of them flew up on the dresser and knocked the glass of the lamp off it, and it fell on the floor and was broken. The woman caught her cock after that and killed it, but she could not kill the other cock, for it was belonging to the man who lived in the next house. Then himself got a sickness and died after that.'

I asked if he ever heard the fairy music on the island.

'I heard some of the boys talking in the school a while ago,' he said, 'and they were saying that their brothers and another man went out fishing a morning, two weeks ago, before the cock crew. When they were down near the Sandy Head they heard music near them, and it was the fairies were in it. I've heard of other things too. One time three men were out at night in a curagh, and they saw a big ship coming down on them. They were frightened at it, and they tried to get away, but it came on nearer them, till one of the men turned round and made the sign of the cross, and then they didn't see it any more.'

Then he went on in answer to another question :

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‘We do often see the people who do be away with them. There was a young man died a year ago, and he used to come to the window of the house where his brothers slept, and be talking to them in the night. He was married a while before that, and he used to be saying in the night he was sorry he had not promised the land to his son, and that it was to him it should go. Another time he was saying something about a mare, about her hoofs, or the shoes they should put on her. A little while ago Patch Ruadh saw him going down the road with broga arda’ (leather boots) ‘on him and a new suit. Then two men saw him in another place.

‘Do you see that straight wall of cliff?’ he went on a few moments later, pointing to a place below us. ‘It is there the fairies do be playing ball in the night, and you can see the marks of their heels when you come in the morning, and three stones they have to mark the line, and another big stone they hop the ball on. It’s often the boys have put away the three stones, and they will always be back again in the morning, and a while since the man who owns the land took the big stone itself and rolled it down and threw it over the cliff, yet in the morning it was back in its place before him.’

I am in the south island again, and I have

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come upon some old men with a wonderful variety of stories and songs, the last, fairly often, both in English and Irish. I went round to the house of one of them to-day, with a native scholar who can write Irish, and we took down a certain number, and heard others. Here is one of the tales the old man told us at first before he had warmed to his subject. I did not take it down, but it ran in this way :

There was a man of the name of Charley Lambert, and every horse he would ride in a race he would come in first.

The people in the country were angry with him at last, and this law was made, that he should ride no more at races, and if he rode, any one who saw him would have the right to shoot him. After that there was a gentleman from that part of the country over in England, and he was talking one day with the people there, and he said that the horses of Ireland were the best horses. The English said it was the English horses were the best, and at last they said there should be a race, and the English horses would come over and race against the horses of Ireland, and the gentleman put all his money on that race.

Well, when he came back to Ireland he went to Charley Lambert, and asked him to ride on

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his horse. Charley said he would not ride, and told the gentleman the danger he'd be in. Then the gentleman told him the way he had put all his property on the horse, and at last Charley asked where the races were to be, and the hour and the day. The gentleman told him.

'Let you put a horse with a bridle and saddle on it every seven miles along the road from here to the racecourse on that day,' said Lambert, 'and I'll be in it.'

When the gentleman was gone, Charley stripped off his clothes and got into his bed. Then he sent for the doctor, and when he heard him coming he began throwing about his arms the way the doctor would think his pulse was up with the fever.

The doctor felt his pulse and told him to stay quiet till the next day, when he would see him again.

The next day it was the same thing, and so on till the day of the races. That morning Charley had his pulse beating so hard the doctor thought bad of him.

'I'm going to the races now, Charley,' said he; 'but I'll come in and see you again when I'll be coming back in the evening, and let you be very careful and quiet till you see me.'

As soon as he had gone Charley leapt up out of bed and got on his horse, and rode seven

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miles to where the first horse was waiting for him. Then he rode that horse seven miles, and another horse seven miles more, till he came to the racecourse.

He rode on the gentleman's horse, and he won the race.

There were great crowds looking on, and when they saw him coming in they said it was Charley Lambert, or the devil was in it; for there was no one else could bring in a horse the way he did, for the leg was after being knocked off of the horse, and he came in all the same.

When the race was over, he got up on the horse was waiting for him, and away with him for seven miles. Then he rode the other horse seven miles, and his own horse seven miles, and when he got home he threw off his clothes and lay down on his bed.

After a while the doctor came back and said it was a great race they were after having.

The next day the people were saying it was Charley Lambert was the man who rode the horse. An inquiry was held, and the doctor swore that Charley was ill in his bed, and he had seen him before the race and after it, so the gentleman saved his fortune.

After that he told me another story of the same sort about a fairy rider, who met a gentleman

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that was after losing all his fortune but a shilling, and begged the shilling of him. The gentleman gave him the shilling, and the fairy rider—a little red man—rode a horse for him in a race, waving a red handkerchief to him as a signal when he was to double the stakes, and made him a rich man.

Then he gave us an extraordinary English doggerel rhyme which I took down, though it seems singularly incoherent when written out at length. These rhymes are repeated by the old men as a sort of chant, and when a line comes that is more than usually irregular they seem to take a real delight in forcing it into the mould of the recitative. All the time he was chanting the old man kept up a kind of snake-like movement in his body, which seemed to fit the chant and make it part of him.

THE WHITE HORSE.

My horse he is white,
Though at first he was bay,
And he took great delight
In travelling by night
And by day.

His travels were great
If I could but half of them tell,

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He was rode in the garden by Adam,
The day that he fell.

On Babylon plains
He ran with speed for the plate,
He was hunted next day
By Hannibal the great.

After that he was hunted
In the chase of a fox,
When Nebuchadnezzar ate grass,
In the shape of an ox.

We are told in the next verses of his going
into the ark with Noah, of Moses riding him
through the Red Sea ; then—

He was with King Pharaoh in Egypt
When fortune did smile,
And he rode him stately along
The gay banks of the Nile.

He was with King Saul and all
His troubles went through,
He was with King David the day
That Goliath he slew.

For a few verses he is with Juda and Mac-
cabeus the great, with Cyrus, and back again to
Babylon. Next we find him as the horse that
came into Troy.

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When () came to Troy with joy,
My horse he was found,
He crossed over the walls and entered
The city I'm told.

• • • • •
I come on him again, in Spain,
And he in full bloom,
By Hannibal the great he was rode,
And he crossing the Alps into Rome.

The horse being tall
And the Alps very high,
His rider did fall
And Hannibal the great lost an eye.

Afterwards he carries young Siphon (Scipio),
and then he is ridden by Brian when driving the
Danes from Ireland, and by St. Ruth when he
fell at the battle of Aughrim, and by Sarsfield at
the siege of Limerick.

He was with King James who sailed
To the Irish shore,
But at last he got lame,
When the Boyne's bloody battle was o'er.

He was rode by the greatest of men
At famed Waterloo,

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Brave Daniel O'Connell he sat
On his back it is true.

.
Brave Dan's on his back,
He's ready once more for the field.
He never will stop till the Tories,
He'll make them to yield.

Grotesque as this long rhyme appears, it has, as I said, a sort of existence when it is crooned by the old man at his fireside, and it has great fame in the island. The old man himself is hoping that I will print it, for it would not be fair, he says, that it should die out of the world, and he is the only man here who knows it, and none of them have ever heard it on the mainland. He has a couple more examples of the same kind of doggerel, but I have not taken them down.

Both in English and in Irish the songs are full of words the people do not understand themselves, and when they come to say the words slowly their memory is usually uncertain.

All the morning I have been digging maiden-hair ferns with a boy I met on the rocks, who was in great sorrow because his father died suddenly a week ago of a pain in his heart.

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‘We wouldn’t have chosen to lose our father for all the gold there is in the world,’ he said, ‘and it’s great loneliness and sorrow there is in the house now.’

Then he told me that a brother of his who is a stoker in the navy, had come home a little while before his father died, and that he had spent all his money in having a fine funeral, with plenty of drink at it, and tobacco.

‘My brother has been a long way in the world,’ he said, ‘and seen great wonders. He does be telling us of the people that do come out to them from Italy, and Spain, and Portugal, and that it is a sort of Irish they do be talking—not English at all—though it is only a word here and there you’d understand.’

When we had dug out enough of roots from the deep crannies in the rocks where they are only to be found, I gave my companion a few pence and sent him back to his cottage.

The old man who tells me the Irish poems is curiously pleased with the translations I have made from some of them.

He would never be tired, he says, listening while I would be reading them, and they are much finer things than his old bits of rhyme.

Here is one of them, as near the Irish as I am able to make it :

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RUCARD MOR.

I put the sorrow of destruction on the bad luck,
For it would be a pity ever to deny it,
It is to me it is stuck,
By loneliness my pain, my complaining.

It is the fairy host
Put me a-wandering
And took from me my goods of the world.

At Mannistir na Ruaidthe
It is on me the shameless deed was done :
Finn Bheara and his fairy host
Took my little horse on me from under the bag.

If they left me the skin
It would bring me tobacco for three months,
But they did not leave anything with me
But the old minister in its place.

Am not I to be pitied ?
My bond and my note are on her,
And the price of her not yet paid,
My loneliness, my pain, my complaining.

The devil a hill or a glen, or highest fort
Ever was built in Ireland,
Is not searched on me for my mare,
And I am still at my complaining.

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I got up in the morning,
I put a red spark in my pipe.
I went to the Cnoc-Maithe
To get satisfaction from them.

I spoke to them,
If it was in them to do a right thing,
To get me my little mare,
Or I would be changing my wits.

‘Do you hear, Rucard Mor?
It is not here is your mare,
She is in Glenasmoil
With the fairy men these three months.’

I ran on in my walking,
I followed the road straightly,
I was in Glenasmoil
Before the noon was ended.

I spoke to the fairy man,
If it was in him to do a right thing,
To get me my little mare,
Or I would be changing my wits.

‘Do you hear, Rucard Mor?
It is not here is your mare,
She is in Cnoc Bally Brishlawn
With the horseman of the music these three months.’

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I ran off on my walking,
I followed the road straightly,
I was in Cnoc Bally Brishlawn
With the black fall of the night.

That is a place was a crowd
As it was seen by me,
All the weavers of the globe,
It is there you would have news of them.

I spoke to the horseman,
If it was in him to do a right thing,
To get me my little mare,
Or I would be changing my wits.

‘Do you hear, Rucard Mor?
It is not here is your mare,
She is in Cnoc Cruachan,
In the back end of the palace.’

I ran off on my walking,
I followed the road straightly,
I made no rest or stop
Till I was in face of the palace.

That is the place was a crowd
As it appeared to me,
The men and women of the country,
And they all making merry.

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Arthur Scoil (?) stood up
And began himself giving the lead,
It is joyful, light and active,
I would have danced the course with them.

They drew up on their feet,
And they began to laugh,—
'Look at Rucard Mor,
And he looking for his little mare.'

I spoke to the man,
And he ugly and humpy,
Unless he would get me my mare
I would break a third of his bones.

'Do you hear, Rucard Mor?
It is not here is your mare,
She is in Alvin of Leinster,
On a halter with my mother.'

I ran off on my walking,
And I came to Alvin of Leinster.
I met the old woman—
On my word she was not pleasing.

I spoke to the old woman,
And she broke out in English :
'Get agone, you rascal,
I don't like your notions.'

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‘Do you hear, you old woman ?
Keep away from me with your English,
But speak to me with the tongue
I hear from every person.’

‘It is from me you will get word of her,
Only you come too late—
I made a hunting cap
For Conal Cath of her yesterday.’

I ran off on my walking,
Through roads that were cold and dirty,
I fell in with the fairy man,
And he lying down on in the Ruaidthe.

‘I pity a man without a cow,
I pity a man without a sheep,
But in the case of a man without a horse
It is hard for him to be long in the world.’

This morning, when I had been lying for a long time on a rock near the sea watching some hooded crows that were dropping shellfish on the rocks to break them, I saw one bird that had a large white object, which it was dropping continually without any result. I got some stones and tried to drive it off when the thing had fallen, but several times the bird was too quick for me, and made off with it before I could get

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down to him. At last, however, I dropped a stone almost on top of him and he flew away. I clambered down hastily, and found to my amazement a worn golf ball! No doubt it had been brought out some way or other from the links in County Clare, which are not far off, and the bird had been trying half the morning to break it.

Further on I had a long talk with a young man who is inquisitive about modern life, and I explained to him an elaborate trick or corner on the Stock Exchange that I heard of lately. When I got him to understand it fully, he shouted with delight and amusement.

‘Well,’ he said, when he was quiet again, ‘isn’t it a great wonder to think that those men are as big rogues as ourselves.’

The old story-teller has given me a long rhyme about a man who fought with an eagle. It is rather irregular, and has some obscure passages, but I have translated it with the scholar.

PHELMIM AND THE EAGLE.

On my getting up in the morning
And I bothered, on a Sunday,
I put my brogues on me,
And I going to Tierny

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In the Glen of the Dead People.
It is there the big eagle fell in with me,
He like a black stack of turf sitting up stately.

I called him a lout and a fool,
The son of a female and a fool,
Of the race of the Clan Cleopas, the biggest rogues in
the land.
That and my seven curses
And never a good day to be on you,
Who stole my little cock from me that could crow the
sweetest.

‘Keep your wits right in you
And don’t curse me too greatly,
By my strength and my oath
I never took rent of you,
I didn’t grudge what you would have to spare
In the house of the burnt pigeons,
It is always useful you were to men of business.

‘But get off home
And ask Nora
What name was on the young woman that scalded his
head.
The feathers there were on his ribs
Are burnt on the hearth,
And they eat him and they taking and it wasn’t much
were thankful.’

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‘You are a liar, you stealer,
They did not eat him, and they’re taking
Nor a taste of the sort without being thankful,
You took him yesterday
As Nora told me,
And the harvest quarter will not be spent till I take a
tax of you.’

‘Before I lost the Fianna
It was a fine boy I was,
It was not about thieving was my knowledge,
But always putting spells,
Playing games and matches with the strength of Goll
Mac Morna,
And you are making me a rogue
At the end of my life.’

‘There is a part of my father’s books with me,
Keeping in the bottom of a box,
And when I read them the tears fall down from me.
But I found out in history
That you are a son of the Dearg Mor,
If it is fighting you want and you won’t be thankful.’

The Eagle dressed his bravery
With his share of arms and his clothes,
He had the sword that was the sharpest
Could be got anywhere.
I and my scythe with me,
And nothing on but my shirt,
We went at each other early in the day.

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We were as two giants
Ploughing in a valley in a glen of the mountains.
We did not know for the while which was the better
man.

You could hear the shakes that were on our arms
under each other,
From that till the sunset,
Till it was forced on him to give up.

I wrote a 'challenge boxail' to him
On the morning of the next day,
To come till we would fight without doubt at the
dawn of day.
The second fist I drew on him
I struck him on the bone of his jaw,
He fell, and it is no lie there was a cloud in his head.

The Eagle stood up,
He took the end of my hand :
'You are the finest man I ever saw in my life,
Go off home, my blessing will be on you for ever,
You have saved the fame of Eire for yourself till the
Day of the Judgment.'

Ah ! neighbours, did you hear
The goodness and power of Phelim ?
The biggest wild beast you could get,
The second fist he drew on it
He struck it on the jaw,
It fell, and it did not rise
Till the end of two days.

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Well as I seem to know these people of the islands, there is hardly a day that I do not come upon some new primitive feature of their life.

Yesterday I went into a cottage where the woman was at work, and very carelessly dressed. She waited for a while till I got into conversation with her husband, and then she slipped into the corner and put on a clean petticoat and a bright shawl round her neck. Then she came back and took her place at the fire.

This evening I was in another cottage till very late talking to the people. When the little boy—the only child of the house—got sleepy, the old grandmother took him on her lap and began singing to him. As soon as he was drowsy she worked his clothes off him by degrees, scratching him softly with her nails as she did so all over his body. Then she washed his feet with a little water out of a pot and put him into his bed.

When I was going home the wind was driving the sand into my face so that I could hardly find my way. I had to hold my hat over my mouth and nose, and my hand over my eyes while I groped along, with my feet feeling for rocks and holes in the sand.

I have been sitting all the morning with an old man who was making sugawn ropes for his

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house, and telling me stories while he worked. He was a pilot when he was young, and we had great talk at first about Germans, and Italians, and Russians, and the ways of seaport towns. Then he came round to talk of the middle island, and he told me this story, which shows the curious jealousy that is between the islands :

Long ago we used all to be pagans, and the saints used to be coming to teach us about God and the creation of the world. The people on the middle island were the last to keep a hold on the fire-worshipping, or whatever it was they had in those days ; but in the long run a saint got in among them and they began listening to him, though they would often say in the evening they believed, and then say the morning after that they did not believe. In the end the saint gained them over and they began building a church, and the saint had tools that were in use with them for working with the stones. When the church was half-way up the people held a kind of meeting one night among themselves, when the saint was asleep in his bed, to see if they did really believe and no mistake in it.

The leading man got up, and this is what he said : that they should go down and throw their tools over the cliff, for if there was such a man as God, and if the saint was as well known to

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Him as he said, then he would be as well able to bring up the tools out of the sea as they were to throw them in.

They went then and threw their tools over the cliff.

When the saint came down to the church in the morning the workmen were all sitting on the stones and no work doing.

‘For what cause are you idle?’ asked the saint.

‘We have no tools,’ said the men, and then they told him the story of what they had done.

He kneeled down and prayed God that the tools might come up out of the sea, and after that he prayed that no other people might ever be as great fools as the people on the middle island, and that God might preserve their dark minds of folly to them till the end of the world. And that is why no man out of that island can tell you a whole story without stammering, or bring any work to end without a fault in it.

I asked him if he had known old Pat Dirane on the middle island, and heard the fine stories he used to tell.

‘No one knew him better than I did,’ he said ; ‘for I do often be in that island making curaghs for the people. One day old Pat came down to me when I was after tarring a new

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curagh, and he asked me to put a little tar on the knees of his breeches the way the rain wouldn't come through on him.

'I took the brush in my hand, and I had him tarred down to his feet before he knew what I was at. "Turn round the other side now," I said, "and you'll be able to sit where you like." Then he felt the tar coming in hot against his skin and he began cursing my soul, and I was sorry for the trick I'd played on him.'

This old man was the same type as the genial, whimsical old men one meets all through Ireland, and had none of the local characteristics that are so marked on Inishmaan.

When we were tired talking I showed some of my tricks, and a little crowd collected. When they were gone another old man who had come up began telling us about the fairies. One night when he was coming home from the lighthouse he heard a man riding on the road behind him, and he stopped to wait for him, but nothing came. Then he heard as if there was a man trying to catch a horse on the rocks, and in a little time he went on. The noise behind him got bigger as he went along, as if twenty horses, and then as if a hundred or a thousand, were galloping after him. When he came to the stile where he had to leave the road and got out over it, something hit against

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him and threw him down on the rock, and a gun he had in his hand fell into the field beyond him.

‘I asked the priest we had at that time what was in it,’ he said, ‘and the priest told me it was the fallen angels; and I don’t know but it was.’

‘Another time,’ he went on, ‘I was coming down where there is a bit of a cliff and a little hole under it, and I heard a flute playing in the hole or beside it, and that was before the dawn began. Whatever anyone says there are strange things. There was one night thirty years ago a man came down to get my wife to go up to his wife, for she was in child-bed.

‘He was something to do with the light-house or the coastguards, one of them Protestants who don’t believe in any of these things, and do be making fun of us. Well, he asked me to go down and get a quart of spirits while my wife would be getting herself ready, and he said he would go down along with me if I was afraid.

‘I said I was not afraid, and I went by myself.

‘When I was coming back there was something on the path, and wasn’t I a foolish fellow, I might have gone to one side or the other over the sand, but I went on straight till I was near it—till I was too near it—then I remembered that I had heard them saying none of those

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creatures can stand before you and you saying the *De Profundis*, so I began saying it, and the thing ran off over the sand and I got home.

‘Some of the people used to say it was only an old jackass that was on the path before me, but I never heard tell of an old jackass would run away from a man and he saying the *De Profundis*.’

I told him the story of the fairy ship which had disappeared when the man made the sign of the cross, as I had heard it on the middle island.

‘There do be strange things on the sea,’ he said. ‘One night I was down there where you can see that green point, and I saw a ship coming in and I wondered what it would be doing coming so close to the rocks. It came straight on towards the place I was in, and then I got frightened and ran up to the houses, and when the captain saw me running he changed his course and went away.’

‘Sometimes I used to go out as a pilot at that time—I went a few times only. Well, one Sunday a man came down and said there was a big ship coming into the sound. I ran down with two men and we went out in a curagh; we went round the point where they said the ship was, and there was no ship in it. As it was a Sunday we had nothing to do, and it was a fine calm day, so we rowed out a long way

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looking for the ship, till I was further than I ever was before or after. When I wanted to turn back we saw a great flock of birds on the water and they all black, without a white bird through them. They had no fear of us at all, and the men with me wanted to go up to them, so we went further. When we were quite close they got up, so many that they blackened the sky, and they lit down again a hundred or maybe a hundred and twenty yards off. We went after them again, and one of the men wanted to kill one with a thole-pin, and the other man wanted to kill one with his rowing stick. I was afraid they would upset the curagh, but they would go after the birds.

‘When we were quite close one man threw the pin and the other man hit at them with his rowing stick, and the two of them fell over in the curagh, and she turned on her side, and only it was quite calm the lot of us were drowned.

‘I think those black gulls and the ship were the same sort, and after that I never went out again as a pilot. It is often curaghs go out to ships and find there is no ship.

‘A while ago a curagh went out to a ship from the big island, and there was no ship ; and all the men in the curagh were drowned. A fine song was made about them after that, though I never heard it myself.

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‘Another day a curagh was out fishing from this island, and the men saw a hooker not far from them, and they rowed up to it to get a light for their pipes—at that time there were no matches—and when they got up to the big boat it was gone out of its place, and they were in great fear.’

Then he told me a story he had got from the mainland about a man who was driving one night through the country, and met a woman who came up to him and asked him to take her into his cart. He thought something was not right about her, and he went on. When he had gone a little way he looked back, and it was a pig was on the road and not a woman at all.

He thought he was a done man, but he went on. When he was going through a wood further on, two men came out to him, one from each side of the road, and they took hold of the bridle of the horse and led it on between them. They were old stale men with frieze clothes on them, and the old fashions. When they came out of the wood he found people as if there was a fair on the road, with the people buying and selling and they not living people at all. The old men took him through the crowd, and then they left him. When he got home and told the old people of the two old men and the ways and fashions they had about them, the old people

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told him it was his two grandfathers had taken care of him, for they had had a great love for him and he a lad growing up.

This evening we had a dance in the inn parlour, where a fire had been lighted and the tables had been pushed into the corners. There was no master of the ceremonies, and when I had played two or three jigs and other tunes on my fiddle there was a pause, as I did not know how much of my music the people wanted, or who else could be got to sing or play. For a moment a deadlock seemed to be coming, but a young girl I knew fairly well saw my difficulty, and took the management of our festivities into her hands. At first she asked a coastguard's daughter to play a reel on the mouth organ, which she did at once with admirable spirit and rhythm. Then the little girl asked me to play again, telling me what I should choose, and went on in the same way managing the evening till she thought it was time to go home. Then she stood up, thanked me in Irish, and walked out of the door, without looking at anybody, but followed almost at once by the whole party.

When they had gone I sat for a while on a barrel in the public-house talking to some young men who were reading a paper in Irish. Then

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I had a long evening with the scholar and two story-tellers—both old men who had been pilots—taking down stories and poems. We were at work for nearly six hours, and the more matter we got the more the old men seemed to remember.

‘I was to go out fishing to-night,’ said the younger as he came in; ‘but I promised you to come, and you’re a civil man, so I wouldn’t take five pounds to break my word to you. And now’—taking up his glass of whisky—‘here’s to your good health, and may you live till they make you a coffin out of a gooseberry bush, or till you die in child-bed.’

They drank my health and our work began.

‘Have you heard tell of the poet MacSweeny?’ said the same man, sitting down near me.

‘I have,’ I said, ‘in the town of Galway.’

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I’ll tell you his piece “The Big Wedding,” for it’s a fine piece, and there aren’t many that know it. There was a poor servant girl out in the country, and she got married to a poor servant boy. MacSweeny knew the two of them, and he was away at that time, and it was a month before he came back. When he came back he went to see Peggy O’Hara—that was the name of the girl—and he asked her if they had had a great wedding. Peggy said it was only middling,

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but they hadn't forgotten him all the same, and she had a bottle of whisky for him in the cupboard. He sat down by the fire and began drinking the whisky. When he had a couple of glasses taken and was warm by the fire, he began making a song, and this was the song that he made about the wedding of Peggy O'Hara.'

He had the poem in both English and Irish ; but as it has been found elsewhere and attributed to another folk-poet, I need not give it.

We had another round of porter and whisky, and then the old man who had MacSweeny's wedding gave us a bit of a drinking song, which the scholar took down, and I translated with him afterwards :

'This is what the old woman says at the Beulleaca when she sees a man without knowledge :

'Were you ever at the house of the Still, did you ever get a drink from it? Neither wine nor beer is as sweet as it is ; but it is well I was not burnt when I fell down after a drink of it by the fire of Mr. Sloper.

'I praise Owen O'Hernon over all the doctors of Ireland ; it is he put drugs on the water, and it lying on the barley.

'If you gave but a drop of it to an old woman

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who does be walking the world with a stick, she would think for a week that it was a fine bed was made for her.'

After that I had to get out my fiddle and play some tunes for them while they finished their whisky. A new stock of porter was brought in this morning to the little public-house underneath my room, and I could hear in the intervals of our talk that a number of men had come in to treat some neighbours from the middle island, and were singing many songs, some of them in English of the kind I have given, but most of them in Irish.

A little later, when the party broke up downstairs, my old men got nervous about the fairies—they live some distance away—and set off across the sandhills.

The next day I left with the steamer.