

Here dwell 350 human beings, who support themselves by fishing, and on the produce of their potato plots, with a little barley; the poorer subsisting on the contributions of their neighbours, eked out by a little sea-weed of a peculiar species, abundant on that shore. They all speak the Irish language, and among them remains a trace of that government by kings or chiefs which, ages ago, existed in Ireland. The present king of Inniskeen is an intelligent peasant. His authority is universally acknowledged in the islands; by him all disputes are settled; to his decision all submit; and his government appears both satisfactory and equitable. But his people are a rude, uncivilised race, totally uneducated, and without the means of acquiring instruction in aught save the semi-barbarous customs of their forefathers. Occasionally they have been visited by itinerant preachers, but so casual have such visits been, short their duration, and the good resulting so very slight, that the vast majority remain sunk in a state of ignorance hardly credible. In this dark spot the light of the gospel has never steadily shone, and save during the short visits of the clergyman, seldom have these islanders heard of eternal life, as the free gift of God, by faith in Jesus Christ. They are nominally members of the Roman Catholic Church, but of its tenets they know little. There is no priest resident among them, and the sum of their religion appears to be the observance of a series of superstitious practices, in which their hopes for a time as well as eternity are placed. But deep as is the social and religious gloom which surrounds this people, there is a yet darker shade spread over them. Here Paganism, as fearful as that prevalent on the banks of the Ganges, is openly practised. In the south island, in the house of a man named Monigan, a stone idol, called in the Irish language "Neeroge," has been from time immemorial carefully and religiously preserved and worshipped. This idol, in

appearance, resembles a thick roll of home-spun flannel, which arises from the custom of dedicating to it a dress of that material whenever its aid is sought. This dress is sewed on by an old woman, whose peculiar office it seems to be. Of the early history of this idol I can gain no authentic information, but its power and influence appear to be immense; they implore its aid in time of need and sickness; it is invoked when a tempest is desired to dash some hapless ship on their coast; and again the exercise of its power solicited to calm the angry ocean, to admit of fishing or visiting the mainland. The following instance may illustrate the faith reposed in their bit of stone by this deluded people. About eighteen months ago, during a continuance of boisterous weather, a person in the south island became so ill, that his life was despaired of; and as the exercise of the idol's power did not seem to be vouchsafed to help him, his relatives became most anxious to bring him the priest from the mainland, that he might have a happy death. The case being urgent, they determined to go, but the storm being great, they dared not venture without their idol to protect them. It was, therefore, taken into the boat, and their mission being successful, they declared to one of my Scripture readers, that their safety was attributable solely to the influence of their idol; afterwards on the unexpected recovery of the man, they expressed their firm conviction that his restoration was effected by the "Neeroge." This is one of many wonders said to be wrought by this God of stone, and will suffice to shew the extent of pagan worship in this wild and distant land.

The History of a Plant.

CHAPTER IV.—HOW THE SEED BEGINS TO GROW.

You have heard what there is in the seed, and what makes it sprout; I am going to tell you in this chapter, *how it sprouts*, which is the beginning