

## STORIES OF AN IRISH RIVER.

The Sinh is a river in the west of Ireland, which empties itself into the Shannon. The gentry whose country-seats stood well up from its banks talked of the loveliness of its scenery; compared it favorably with the Thames, and expected their summer visitors to sketch "bits," or express its charms in song.

The poor people, inhabitants of the scattered cottages or little villages situated here and there along the river's course, thanked God after every flood that not a larger number of them were dying from the effects of some three weeks living in houses two and three and four feet deep in water. For after every prolonged fall of rain,—a frequent event in western Ireland,—the Sinh, disdaining the mild control of its banks, spread far to right and left over adjoining lands. Yet, still the people would build their houses in the low-lying regions which just at the moment might not be absolutely in the liquid state; and still they collected their hay into "cocks" near the water's edge, though a season had never gone by without the greater part having been swept down the river's course.

Athleague was one of these periodically inundated villages. Probably the same blind faith in a Providence, whom, as it seems, the people thought after each successive flood might possibly now be appeased, had acted in determining them to add house to house during the first years of the existence of the village. However, that time was far back in the past, and each new generation found itself subject to certain conditions—as it happened unfavorable, but no doubt assigned by the inscrutable will of God.

The village was inhabited by the poorer class, who got their living mainly by agricultural labor, or as "hands" at the large corn mill standing at one end of the village.

The Rector and some private gentlemen had some variously sized estates in the neighborhood. They formed a society of their own, which, so far as human interests were concerned, had nothing in common with the villagers. They were practically two different races. The one employed the other, paid it, "tipped it," and gave the old clothes to it. In return this latter admired, fawned and recognized itself of baser blood.

Therefore it may be questioned whether it was simply the wish of alleviating the discomforts of their poorer neighbors that eventually led certain gentlemen living near Athleague to instigate the county members to represent in Parliament the damage to the country that was being occasioned by these floods, and to propose that works should be set on foot to drain the river, for which a necessary grant of money should be assigned.

These particular gentlemen had large estates by the river, and it was well known that calculations had been made of the increase in value of their lands subject to no possible spoliation by floods.

In course of time the so-called Sinh Drainage Bill passed through Parliament, and the grant of money was made. The works were set on foot, and became the means of beginning a new era in the life of many a village along the Sinh.

Portions of the river were taken one after the other, the bed deepened or the main current diverted into a newly-cut canal, or tumble-down weirs removed, or small obstructive islands cut away. As each portion became finished, and the works were moved on to the next portion, a more or less large gang of navvies followed in the track.

These latter were spoken of as "those Sinh men," by the inhabitants of the various localities through which they passed. As a rule, they consisted of the roughest and poorest class of men, drawn from out-of-the-way districts, whose worldly possessions consisted for the most part of the ragged garments on their backs, a clay pipe and a bit of hard tobacco. In common with other animals, however, these men did like a shelter at night, and to have some approximation to cooked food in the shape of potatoes, bacon, and stirabout (porridge).

When the works came to Athleague, the villagers found themselves for the first time applied to for lodgings. This was a new way of adding to their scanty earnings, and there was a sort of dignity, too, in being able to take in lodgers, though their houses might consist of but two rooms, clay-floored and ceilingless. Yet the lodgers were quite content so long as they were actually covered, and seven or eight perhaps would gather at night into one cottage, and with a sack or two under and a sack or two over, would sleep well, dispersed about the rough clay floor.

And now Patsy Farrell's was not the only one spot in Athleague where a man could be sure of meeting a friend, but the loafers would often betake themselves to the end part of the bridge wall, whence could be had a good view of the busy navvies wielding pick-axes and shovelling away soil, and with their barrows running hither and thither over planks laid from stone to stone. It is true, here they were without the whisky that Patsy Farrell supplied, but they would reflect that that could wait till later on in the evening.

The Rector, as he drove smartly by in his neat dog-cart, would turn to his companions, and tell them jocularly that here were the quarters of the village club.

The Rector himself had a special interest in the drainage of the Sinh, for he had been appointed secretary to the Board which directed the works, and, moreover, part of his outhouses and a yard were let to the same Drainage Board for the storage of plant and