

BELLS AND BLARNEY.

"SWEET CORK." THE CITY OF "FATHER PROUT."

The Perils of Kissing the Famous Block
of Stone That Hangs Outside the
Old Blarney Castle.

She has been called the Capital of the South, this proud and poverty stricken Cork. Says the historian: "Corroch, or Corcagh, the Irish name of Cork, is, like all Irish names of places, strikingly descriptive. It signifies a swamp, to which the situation of the city, on two marshy islands, fully entitles it." Nay, but has not Spenser, prince of poets, sung of

"The spreading Lee, that like an island fair
Encloseth Cork with his dividing flood!"

And has she not bred great men?—James Barry—one of his first great paintings was the conversion of a king of Cashel, by St. Patrick, and it won him the patronage of Edmund Burke, Daniel Maclise, the witty Maginn, racy and rare "Father Prout," Crofton Croker, and, not least of these, Sheridan Knowles.

Cork was long the home of a pagan temple. St. Fionn Bar, the anchorite from Gougane Barra, founded a monastery on the site of it, in the beginning of the 7th century; his seminary was attended by 700 scholars, "who flocked in from all parts." Two centuries later the Danes overran the kingdom. The Corkites frequently went forth and battled bravely. In 1493 the city sheltered the impostor King, Perkin Warbeck, for which act she was deprived of her charter and had her mayor duly drawn and quartered.

In 1609 King James I. restored the charter. Cork turned to the Stuarts—but in walked Cromwell with his crazy crew, and sowed desolation in his path. This Cromwell caused the church bells to be melted down and cast into ordnance. There is a theme for poets; it is one of the most poetical passages in the life of this ruffian, and, not inappropriately, with characteristic obstinacy it begins at the wrong end. Turn church bells into ordnance! It is written that "on being remonstrated with against committing such a profanity, Cromwell replied that as a priest had been the inventor of gunpowder, he thought the best use for bells would be to cast them into cannon." A grim joke, worthy of the grimmest of jokers.

To my eye, the "spreading Lee" is not lovely when it comes within the shadow of Cork; nor is the city over fair. There are a few handsome buildings in the suburbs, and pretty enough villas scattered all over the slopes of the neighboring hills—the hills that enclose the valley of the Lee. The quays are famous; the arrival and departure of 5,000 ships annually serve to make them so; vessels of 600 tons burthen can float there at low water, albeit Cork is twelve miles from the Atlantic.

It is not a comely church, this St. Ann's of Shandon. It was begun in 1722. Its homely bell tower was constructed of hewn stone pilfered from the Franciscan abbey, where King James II. was wont to hear mass. But there were not stones enough available, and so the ruins of Lord Barry's castle supplied the remainder; thus three sides of the steeple are built of limestone, and the fourth of red stone. Truly an unlovely chapel, and as plain within as it is uninviting without.

I wandered through the churchyard which surrounds St. Ann's; looked in at the prim pulpit, and the little organ set half way down the side wall. A few memorial slabs scarcely serve to break the severe plainness of the interior. An old fashioned clock stands in the rear of the gallery—but it was stock still when I laid eyes on it; perhaps it ticks on the seventh day only, "which is the Sabbath," and rests from its labors on the other six.

With a heavy heart I climbed into the heart of the steeple and looked in upon the bells, the echoes of whose chimes have resounded to the very ends of the earth. They were very still, those fine old bells—their shoulders covered thick with dust and cobwebs. From the top of the tower I looked down on the fairest view in Cork—the winding Lee, the green and wooded hills that gather lovingly about it, and many a league of fertile land stretching away toward the cloudy orizon.

A dash of rain drove me round the gallery on to the sheltered side of the tower; and then I heard the bells swinging just

below me, and the famous chimes rolled out their plaintive and monotonous refrain. Surely I should have been happy at this moment, inasmuch as the longing of a lifetime was at last gratified. And so I was, no doubt; but I'd have been happier could I have forgotten how all these years I've been dreaming of the Lee as of a broad and placid river fringed with rushes. Shandon was, in my dreams, a village of Acadian loveliness; and in its midst towered the grey old walls of the village church, its ivy-curtained windows reflected in the silver bosom of the stream that flowed noiselessly below it. And in day dreams the chorus of those bells swam down the tranquil air in faint and fading harmonies divinely sweet.

O, Father Prout, Father Prout! To you I am indebted for a dream and awakening, the one joyous and the other sad. It was you who furnished the theme on which the lively imagination of youth hung fondly, while fancy painted its enticing picture. It was you who sang:

"On this I ponder, where'er I wander,
And thus grow fonder, sweet Cork, of thee;
Why thy bells of Shandon, that sound so grand
On
The pleasant waters of the River Lee."

As I stood in the belfry, below me I saw a miserable congregation of dwellings, good and bad. Across the way there was a butter market of extraordinary dimensions. Surely thy music, O'Shandon bells, pictures fairer scenes than these; and the memory of thy melody has rung in the ears of many a wanderer beyond seas, when, fortunately, the unsavory odors—the only incense that rises before thee in this latter day—have perished on the gale.

The River Lee winds between verdant banks, among diminutive islands and beside lordly castles, for ten delightful miles below the queen city of the South, and then it flows into the broad and handsome Cove of Cork, with Queens-town seated at the junction. Every traveler is loud in his praises of the river and the Cove, and surely there is nothing in the Green Isle much finer.

Blackrock Castle with its turrets and towers, whence William Penn, converted to Quakerism, set sail for America, villas bearing romantic names—Tivoli, Sanssouci, and the like—delight the eye as the little steamer paddles down the quiet stream. On every hand the scenery is enchanting; groves overshadow the shore; fleets of tiny craft sail to and fro, or drift idly in the gentle zephyr that blows too softly to be of much practical service to navigation; the scattering villages, the rich meadow lands, the grey, rain filled sky—all impart a pastoral charm that fully compensates for the disappointments one is pretty sure to encounter on a close inspection of Cork.

At Passage a watering-place on the Cove, many a poet has turned his couplets.

All this the tourist who, at New York, books for Liverpool direct is sure to miss. The ocean steamers lie off the Irish shore, and are visited by small tenders, the sight of which is enough to make a man lose confidence in the greatest navigation company in the world. The cabinless cockleshells that run out from Queens-town laden with qualmish passengers are the first and last drop of bitterness in the cup of joy which so many thousands go abroad in search of.

It is a pleasant and a profitable excursion, by train, to Youghal, on the Blackwater, where a steamer is in readiness to take you up to the largest river in Ireland.

Sir Walter Raleigh was chief magistrate of Youghal in 1588-89. Under the yew trees at "Myrtle Grove"—his former residence—it was his wont to sit with pipe in mouth, for he loved the "nicotian weed"; and there he conned the pages of the new poem, "The Faerie Quean." The fine old Elizabethan house, with its many gables, was a worthy shelter for the "noble and valorous knight," who here introduced the cultivation of the homely and wholesome American plant, with the esculent tubers, popularly known as the Irish potato. It was his custom, between the crops, to pay frequent visits to the poet Spenser, up at Kilcolman, where they had royal times—if I interpret rightly that dainty pastoral, "Colin Clout's Come Home Again." Ah, those were rare days when the boys sat down together to pipe their tobacco-nals!

The wind was blowing furiously; there was a roar as of stormy seas in the groves of Blarney, and a frown on the face of the usually placid little lake. All that is left of the castle, a mere shell, stands

somewhat apart from the village and the lake, though it is near the mansion now occupied by the possessor of the estate.

I was admitted to the castle by a woman, who bade me climb the winding stair till I came to the top; nor did she omit to caution me against falling off on the way up. I climbed and climbed and climbed; three or four times on my way to the turrets I might have plunged headlong from the brink of the doorless passages that open into the interior. Why? Because from turret to foundation stone there is not a solitary floor left in the building. The castle is like an enormous square chimney, pierced with a multitude of small windows. By the side of the spiral stairs that screw their way up one corner of the castle, there are chambers hardly large enough to serve as sleeping rooms, though perhaps once used for that purpose; their walls are of amazing thickness.

The top of the castle wall is quite broad enough for a footpath. The outer ruin, or parapet, is larger than the castle itself, and is held in its place by brackets or protruding stones. Anywhere upon the dizzy path one can look down the outer side of the wall, between it and the outer parapet—could indeed easily drop through the open spaces between the brackets—and the thought of this, quite possible, abrupt exit from the stage of life, on a windy day, when the ruin seems to fairly reel under one, is by no means exhilarating.

The Blarney Stone is clasped to the wall by strong iron bands. It is below the top of the wall, a very long distance from the ground; and in order to kiss it one must let himself down head first, and hang by his toes, as it were. It is advisable to have the aid of a muscular assistant in performing this perilous feat; he can draw you up from below when you have accomplished your purpose.

I was alone on the walls of Blarney castle. The wind whistled about my ears; all the grass and fern tufts that have sprouted among the decaying mortar hissed spitefully. I cautiously crept to the edge of the wall; and, while the earth seemed to swim under me, and the walls of the old castle to sway to and fro, I reached down, down, and yet farther down, clinging like a cat to the crumbling edge of the wall, and—well, never mind! I have lived to tell the tale thus far. There is a twin stone on the ground floor, which I more conveniently saluted; and this one is a frequent substitute for the original.

For more than four centuries this castle has been the sole feature of importance in a pretty though rather lonely landscape. The square tower, with its machicolated battlement—all that is left of the castle—has been visited by pilgrims from every clime; but I fear many of them have asked themselves at a later day, "Was it worth while?" The woman who holds the keys of the castle, and who talks as glibly as if she had been raised on blarney stones, thinks it is worth while. The man on the lawn who sells souvenirs in bog oak agrees with her.

But let us fly to Father Prout, and cleave to him if we would see Ireland as she was, and is, and ever shall be—a joy forever! He sings of Blarney Castle:

"There is a stone there
That whoever kisses,
Ah! he never misses
To grow eloquent;
Tis he may chamber
To a lady's chamber,
Or become a member
Of Parliament."

"A clever spouter
He'll sure turn out, or
An out-and-outer
To be let alone;
Don't hope to blinder him,
Or to bewilder him:
Sure he's a pilgrim
From Blarney Stone."

In the Alps.—Guide: Now you will have to be careful; many a tourist has broken his neck at this spot. Gent, to his wife: Augusta, you go first.

Young composer: What did you think of my compositions, sir? Critic benignly: Well, I don't know exactly what to say; but I think they will be played when Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, and Mendelssohn have been long forgotten. Young composer: Really? Critic: Yes, really. But—not before.

Where is it that, in spite of the proverb, you always find the cart before the horse? In the word "cart horse."—Folks.

IRISH SONGS AND BALLADS.

Ireland, known throughout the past as the land of song as well as of sages, has a lyric literature as old as that of other countries, but it is one characterized by some marked peculiarities. In the first place, it has descended in its native tongue, the Gaelic, to the beginning of the present century; and secondly, it may claim the praise of being pre-eminently lyrical, since it is so largely composed of songs, or emotional verses set to music, and so little, if at all, of ballads, or metrical narratives and descriptions, which, originally chanted to a recitative, came in time to be recited. Mr. Hardiman, who is entitled to be called the Irish "Percy," has put this point beyond dispute. In his admirable collection of Gaelic poetry, the most extensive that has yet been made, and which has the further merit of being excellently translated by his colleagues, there is not a ballad to be found. Ballads, in the musical sense of the term—simple songs of a single movement—and odes, or elaborate songs, in various metres to various movements, together with elegies and laments, or brief passionate maledictions, are numerous in this collection; but not one instance, that I can see, of that veritable metrical narrative, heroic or historical, which so much distinguishes the early literature of Spain, England, France, and Germany.

It was reserved for the present century and its group of gifted children, its band of bards and novelists, to bestow on Ireland a title to the merit of ballad poetry—to show how triumphantly native themes could be illustrated with all the fervor and the fancy of a Celtic temperament, all the vividness of local coloring, and all the reality and verisimilitude of idiomatic phraseology. We only need to refer to such striking specimens as Griffin's *Bridal of Malahide*, McGee's *Death of Art M'Murrough*, Davis's *Sark of Baltimore*, T. D. Sullivan's *Death of King Connor McVessa*, and Williams's *Pass of Plumes* as instances of ballad poetry, not only distinguished by some of the most striking and enkindling traits of the national mind, but by an affluence of power and beauty which may challenge comparison with anything of their class in modern writing. To these ought doubtless be added the charming *Forester's Complaint* and *Una Phelimy* of Ferguson, a perfect master of this class of verse, but who is best known to the English public by his *Forging of the Anchor*—a ballad of such an extraordinary mingling of force and picturesqueness, that, though it cannot be said in strictness to have any national distinction, it may claim the scarcely inferior honor of being worthy of the hand of Schiller.

The songs of Ireland have invariably been national—amatory or bacchanalian, social, Jacobite, or patriotic, the true beating of a Celtic pulse is to be felt in every one of them. They abounded in the Gaelic. The well-known Carolan is said to have written as many as two hundred, and Connellan, a minstrel of the seventeenth century, almost four times that amount. Unfortunately, as the harpers labored to sustain the national spirit, they were hated and hunted by their rulers—"a priest, a bard, a wolf" being among the fieldsports of many English governments. Thus but few of their songs survived them.

Carolan, who must be regarded as the last true bard of Ireland, in his union of the fourfold avocation of his race—poet, composer, harper and singer—has but little of their ruling spirit: he is more festive than patriotic, and might be called the Irish Anacreon, but that he addresses woman with a purity and his bottle with an enthusiasm that are but little shared by the Teian poet. Welcome alike to hall and cottage he spent his days in cheering their inmates with his love-songs and his planxties, and doubtless did so all the more in being himself the happiest harper who was ever repaid the loss of sight by the felicities of sound.

It may be interesting to observe what are the classes of Irish songs, and, down to the middle of the past century, what was the proportion they owed to the Gaelic. The native tongue seems to have anticipated nearly every modern lyric variety. It has given us, in the first place, almost the model of the peasant's love-song. Not only the well-known favorites, *Eileen Aroon* and *Molly Astore*, that still linger like good spirits in many a lonely mountain cabin, but the *Coolin*, the *Pastheen Fion*, *Catherine Tyrrel*, the