

JOTTINGS CONCERNING BOYLE, LOUGH KEY AND KILRONAN.

I believe there is some grain of truth in the taunt that Irishmen have holidays to spend in North Wales, Scotland, the Rhine and Switzerland, whilst they have none for their own country where unthought of and unseen, are objects and scenery of surpassing interest. The more one sees of Ireland, the more he loves it, the more he loves its people for their virtues, its hills and valleys for their verdure, its mountains for their grandeur, its lakes and rivers for their beauty, and its Abbeys and ivy clad ruins for their history.

Passing over the chief places of attraction, the Giants Causeway, Killery Bay in Galway, the lovely Shannon, the Blackwater from Youghall to Cappoquin, and the matchless Killarney, these are within easy march of every village, places richly deserving of a frequent visit. A few days ago in company with some friends I visited Boyle, that ancient town built on a knoll, where Lough Gara and Lough Key meet as if for a parlay. Boyle is a place of great interest. It has had a chequered history. Its past history is traced in its old Abbey; its present history is traced in Rockingham House. The Abbey is old and demolished, but in its ruin, it is a thing of beauty—a thing to be proud of manifesting the skill, culture, greatness and piety of the so called "dark ages," the ages of faith.

This Abbey was founded under the generous patronage of The MacDermott, Prince of Moylurg, in 1161, by the Abbot, Maurice O'Dubhay, and dedicated to the Blessed Virgin for Brethren of the Cisterian Order of St Bernard. The style is Anglo-Norman or early English. The nave—131 feet by 25 feet—is separated from the aisles by a noble range of massive arches, supported by circular and clustered columns, with richly ornamented bases and capitals between which are enriched corbals of various designs. The ivy-clad remains of this great ancient Abbey, with the vestiges of the conventual buildings scattered around, will repay the tourist for a lengthened visit. In 1197, Cornelius MacDermot, King of Moylurg, died here in the habit of the Order, and was interred within the precincts. The Irish, as well as the English, armies frequently bivouacked within the Monastery. In 1235, the English forces, commanded by the Lord Justices, Maurice Fitzgerald, who founded the Abbey of Sligo, and MacWilliam De Burgh, whose grandson—the "Red Earl"—built the Castle of Ballymote, seized upon all within the Monastery to punish the monks for assisting the reigning monarch, Roderick O'Connor. In 1315, it was pillaged by Rory O'Moore, but continued to flourish until the suppression in 1537. In 1563 it was granted by Queen Elizabeth to Patrick Cusacke, Co. Meath, by whom or by a lay proprietor, who succeeded him, it was forfeited. In 1595 it was besieged by the great Northern Chieftain, the Earl of Tyrone; and in 1603, it was granted by King James the First to Sir John King, ancestor of the present proprietor, Col. King-Harman.

Around the splendid Monastery grew up a large, populous, and flourishing town, protected, fostered, and enriched by the saintly and learned monks; and this was the happy condition of Boyle, until the Monastery and its possessions passed into the hands of aliens and Protestants. Ever since, Boyle has been getting poorer and poorer each day. Its rich, fertile plains have been unpeopled to feed cattle only; its great water power has been let run to waste; its general fisheries have been fished; its yarn, and other industries, have vanished; its quays at Drum are deserted; and its municipal and parliamentary rights and privileges were bartered by its English proprietor for his own selfish ends and honours. In 1800, Boyle was a Borough, with its Mayor and Burgesses, and a right to return two members to the Irish Parliament. These Corporate and Parliamentary rights were sold by Lord Lorton for £15,000 and a title. By selfish and corrupt practices like this not Boyle alone but Ireland, has been ruined. Boyle, in 1782, after its restoration to its ancient political rights was quite different to the Boyle of to-day. It is now one of the poorest, most neglected, and most decayed of the towns of Ireland. It was great, rich and powerful under the monks of its renowned Abbey. It is now, after the lapse of a few hundred years, a wreck under the Kings of Rockingham. The history of Boyle was the history of the Monastery; it rose with the Monastery, it flourished with the Monastery, and it fell with the Monastery; but, as the ivy-covered Abbey is still honoured, revered, and loved, even in its ruins, so Boyle, as long as a trace of it remains, shall share in the honour and veneration of its founders.

Myself and friends passed quickly from the old Abbey to Rockingham House, glancing as we passed at the new Catholic Church of Boyle, built within a short distance of the Abbey; but within no distance of the grandeur, beauty, and proportions of its prototypes. The times, no doubt, are changed. The generous munificence of The MacDermot was within call when the Abbey church was erected. The new church is being built up under no such advantages. And glancing also through an unrivalled arcade—a mile in length—of tall, well-furnished beeches, at a demesne of 2,000 acres, we thought this a great deal for one man while so many human beings were without a rood to feed them. And as we passed through one grand gate to pass shortly under another grander and greater, we could not but fancy that we were passing through a beautiful antechamber, soon to enter the more superb saloon where everything would be of the grandest. And so it was: Rockingham House, Rockingham demesne, Rockingham gardens, and Rockingham surroundings of wood and water and landscape furnish a fairy scene, a creation of the lamp of Aladdin, which one must see before he can imagine. The house is of the Ionic style, with facades and colonades to suit, and it has an outlook over the 36 islands of Lough Key, which Royalty might envy. Each of these islands has its story and its charms, but Trinity Island, Church Island, and Rock Island, whereon stands the castle of The MacDermot, have a charm and history which can scarcely be surpassed. The gardens and conservatories are stored with choicest fruit, flowers, and exotics. I often heard of Rockingham, but I never realised the beauty of the place until I saw it. Now such is Rockingham under the Kings. No doubt they have done all that taste, skill, and money could do to add to its natural beauties; but how has it fared with Boyle? Has it flourished apace with Rockingham as it did with the monastery? No; it has progressed, but in the inverse ratio: as Rockingham went up down went Boyle. To enrich and make Rockingham, 2,000 acres belonging to Boyle were enclosed for a demesne; fertile plains, ten miles by nine, were stripped of people and given away to a couple of graziers, to save lordly Rockingham from the vulgar sight of that toil and industry by which its superb grandeur is maintained; the lakes and rivers teeming with salmon and other fish were forbidden to the people of Boyle, either for gain or for pleasure; the Kings made Rockingham an earthly paradise, and they made Boyle—a rookery! On the house, the demesne, the islands, the bridges (one of which, the North Bridge, is a gem), hundreds of thousands of pounds have been expended—hundreds of thousands of pounds extracted from tenants living on swamps, and in shanties, and on potatoes and salt! Rockingham, no doubt, is a sight worth seeing. The tourist will be charmed with it; but the tourist must admit that a flourishing town, and a numerous, happy tenantry living on the wide and fertile plains, would bring to the master of Rockingham more real delight than all the pleasures he can derive from his costly and princely mansion, with all its surroundings. Rockingham is forced to make one man great and happy; but what Rockingham cost would make thousands prosperous and happy for ever! In the history of Rockingham we trace the history of Boyle, but in the inverse ratio. Adieu. How, ever, fair and beautiful Rockingham, I shall ever remember with pride and joy the hour spent within thy borders!

We now passed quickly to Kilronan, through Keadee, with its beautiful Catholic church, which we visited and admired. Over the doorway into Kilronan Cemetery we observe the scroll, "Here lies Carolan, the last of the Irish minstrels," and we hasten to gratify our longings for visiting the grave of one of Ireland's most gifted and beloved sons. We know he was buried in the vault of The MacDermot Roe, and this we sought with all the eagerness of enthusiastic pilgrims. The vault is much neglected, and there is nothing to indicate that the great harpist is buried there. Nevertheless, there his remains lie, and whilst a lay of his entrancing minstrelsy remains, his country will honour and treasure his memory as one of her dearest and best trusts.

Terence Carolan was born in 1670, near Nobber, in the county Meath. When sixteen years of age he lost his sight in small-pox. Soon afterwards his father settled in Carrick-on-Shannon, and there young Carolan was met by Mrs MacDermot Roe, who, pitying his condition and admiring his capacity for music, admitted him to receive musical and other lessons with her own children. To this good lady Carolan owed his literary and musical education. He used to muse in solitude, and the harp was his constant companion. He generally chose raths for the production of his strains, so that the country people used to say he was in concert with the fairies. Mrs MacDermot Roe provided him with a horse and attendant, and thus, as an itinerant musician, he used to visit most of the great families in the West of Ireland, to whom he was always welcome. Except Alderford—the seat of The MacDermot Roe—there was no where he was more at home than in Belenagare. He used to say, "Whenever I am among the O'Connors, my harp has the old sound in it." His wife, by whom he had one son and six daughters, died in 1733, and soon after the bard began to droop. Finding that he was growing weak, he made for Alderford, where, as always, he was kindly and affectionately received by his constant friends. There, after composing and playing with special pathos, his "Farewell to Music," he desired to be conducted to his rooms, where he soon died, on the 25th of March, 1738. Hardiman informs us that Terence Carolan was a good and faithful Catholic. We may then hope that he now enjoys

the songs of the Celestial Choir. Peace be to your ashes Terence Carolan! In this cemetery is buried the late Colonel Tennyson, over whose grave is erected the most beautifully carved Irish Cross, to be found anywhere. Close to the Cemetery is a well of St. Atracta, besides which lies a large flag covered with strange characters, which might be interpreted by the Syrians or Egyptians 4,000 years ago, but which are altogether beyond our ken. We pass quickly by Kilronan Castle, Ballyfarnon, Arigna, with its iron and coal mines, and run up to the Rock of Doon, to obtain a full view of Rockingham, and Lough Key, with all its storied islands. Thence we rush to Ballybaugh—the famous battle-ground of the Curliens—where at the hands of the dashing and patriotic O'Rorke, Prince of Breffni, Sir Coneyrs Clifford lost a great battle and his head.

Reserving for another day, our visit to the Castle of Collooney, on the River Uncion, where the head of Sir Coneyrs was quickly conveyed, we row under the guidance of the intelligent Pat Kerins, to Trinity Island, not so much to see the body of Sir Coneyrs, which was buried there, as to visit the Church and Monastery of the H Trinity, part of which is in fair preservation. I cannot dwell at present on the many churches and monasteries, which own their foundation to Trinity Island. From Trinity Island, we row to Rock Island, and standing there on the rock beside the handsome castle of the MacDermot, parts of which are roofed and fitted out for pic-nics, balls, entertainments, bagatelle, and the other amusements, we earnestly hoped the day would yet come when the expelled Royal Family of Moylurg, would return to their loved Castle, and domains, to enjoy for ever again that power, influence, wealth and popularity which their general loyalty to Ireland and their never-doubted constancy in the faith, eminently deserve.