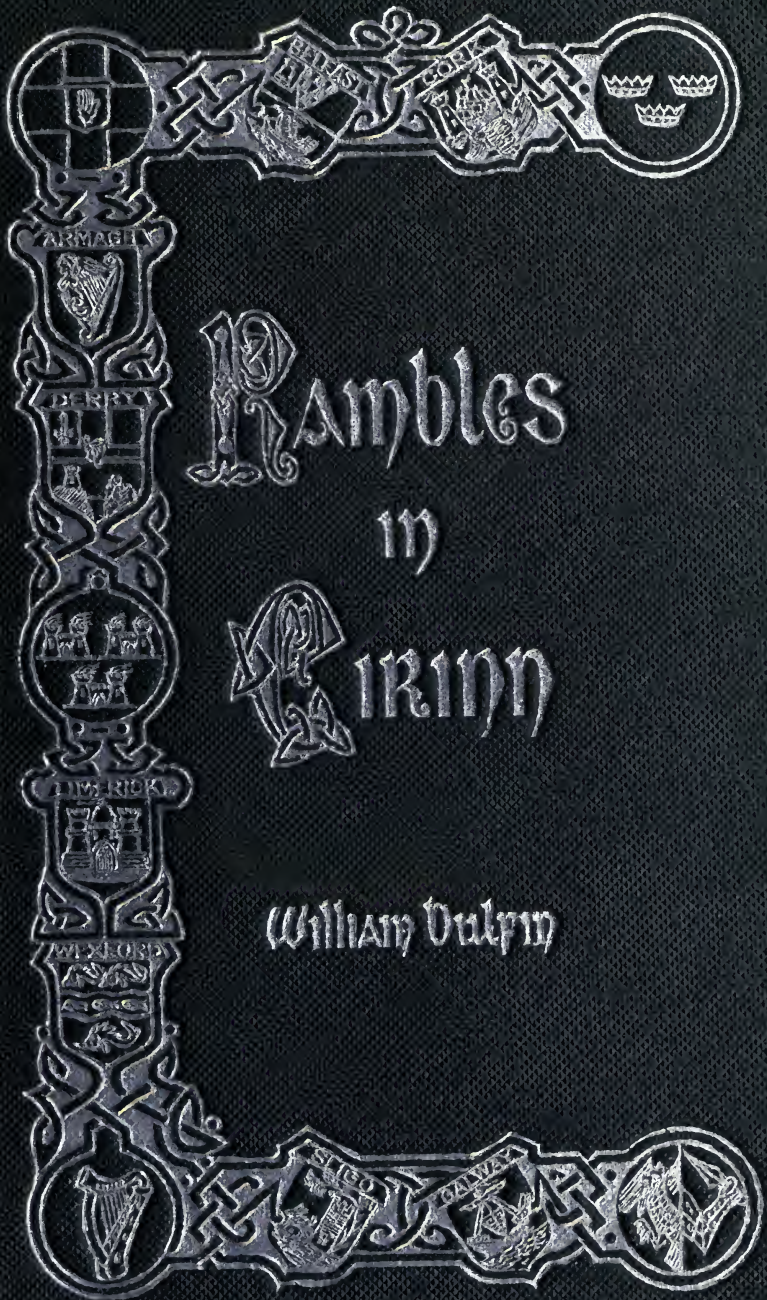

Rambles in Eirinn

William Bulfin

Yours sincerely
William Rudolph

RAMBLES IN EIRINN

BY WILLIAM BULFIN
(CHE BUONO)

When I behold your mountains bold—
Your noble lakes and streams—
A mingled tide of grief and pride
Within my bosom teems.
I think of all your long dark thrall—
Your martyrs brave and true;
And dash apart the tears that start—
We must not *weep* for you.
Dear land—
We must not weep for you
—*O'Hagan*

With Illustrations, and Maps specially made under the author's direction

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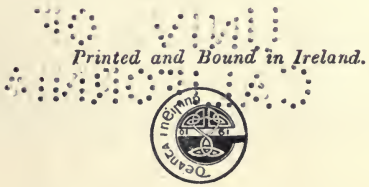

M. H. GILL AND SON, LTD., DUBLIN AND WATERFORD.

TO THE READER.

These pages are the outcome of about three thousand miles of touring within the four seas of Ireland. They were written more or less hurriedly, as opportunity offered, here and there on the road, at irregular intervals, generally out of reach of books of reference; and with the sole object of sharing the writer's thoughts and feelings with certain Irish exiles on the other side of the world.

It never occurred to me at first that Irish people at home would take any special interest in my efforts to describe the things I saw and express the things I felt; and even when some of the literary men of Irish Ireland urged me to publish the "Rambles" in an Irish newspaper, I imagined that their judgment had been obscured by their friendship. Nevertheless I acted on their suggestion, and it would be more than churlish on my part not to acknowledge the keen gratification I have felt over the reception given to the articles as they appeared in "The United Irishman," and afterwards in "Sinn Fein." When they appeared in "The New York Daily News" their reception was also most cordial, and from many parts of the United States I received kindly greetings from people I had never met, suggesting that the series should be published in book form. Like suggestions came from Ireland and from the Argentine Republic. The present publishers came forward, and this volume is the result.

I do not offer it to the public without diffidence, for I am conscious of its defects. Yet I desire not to apologise for its philosophy nor for the spirit in which it was produced. All I care to say for it is that it was written after seventeen crowded years of exile, and that the heart of the writer was in the writing.

And even if the pleasure of writing it was at times not unclouded, there is nothing but gladness and pride in the thought of the friendships it has won for me at home and abroad amongst men and women who are thinking and working for Ireland.

W. B.

Derrinlough, March, 1907.

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RAMBLES IN EIRINN.

I.

Returned from over seas.—Trial spin on my Wexford wheel.—The Summer glory of Ireland.—Across the Brosna River.—Skirting North Tipperary.—Roscrea and Mount St. Joseph.—Interviewing a Beggarman.—Haymaking.

I was hungry for a feast of the summer glory, and I was filled with a desire to dim the workshop lustre of my brand new Wexford wheel. It was the last day of June, and the weather was perfect. The people along the road said it was "shocking warm," and "scorching," and "terrible hot, glory be to God," but after seventeen sweltering years of the sunny South I found it just charming. The first few miles of my trial spin took me down the valley of the middle Shannon, and I laid my seven blessings on the Irish sunshine which never blisters, and on the perfumed winds of the Irish summer which are never laden with flame. How often during the cloudless dog days of the Pampas had I yearned for a cycling tour through Ireland! And how often the thought would come to me that if ever my hopes were realised the fruition would prove flat and stale compared with the pleasures of anticipation. But it was just the reverse.

And I knew that—knew that it was going to be like a visit to fairy-land—before we reached Dublin at all; for like most returning exiles, we were up long before sunrise, watching from the spar-deck of the steamer for the first glimpse of Ireland. There was a faint bluish something at first, on the horizon, which might be a flake of cloud; but little by little it rose into the sky and changed from blue to purple, and we knew that we were looking at the hills over Dublin. It was a splendid dawn. We seemed to have brought with us some of the sunshine of the South, for earth and sea and air were flooded with morning gold. It flamed in the soft clouds which dotted the sky. It flushed the blue. It lay on the hills. It rippled on the water. Soon the headlands began to stand out along the coast. The fields on the mountain sides threw their green into our faces, as one might say—threw it, in soft playfulness and welcome. The woods and groves which at first were only blotches of shadow now caught the light which danced gaily on the masses of foliage. You could see where the feathery larches lay against the deeper verdure of the elms; where the chestnuts and sycamores flung broad shadows on the lawns; where ash and spruce and poplar and copper beech alternated along the slopes, or in the valleys. And you could see the hawthorn, all white and gay in its mantle of summer blossom. There was a ribbon-like streak of country road over which swelled a heathery mountain, and below it was the glint of a river. As the sun climbed higher the sky softened in tone, and a haze of golden grey spread itself over everything. It hung over the city smoke,

it capped the summits of the hills, it veiled the broad fields of tender blue between the fleecy clouds; it even lay over the woodland shadows.

Oh, it was beautiful, beautiful! And then the three hours' homeward run by train from Dublin to the midlands! Every mile of it was a new delight. It took us by Lucan, where the sheep and cattle were deep in flower-strewn grass on the meadows that knew the Sarsfields before the Wild Geese flew from Ireland. Across the Liffey it whirled us, between thick hedges, by some of the Geraldine lands, and under the tree-clad hills where there were Rapparees of the O'Dempseys once upon a time; and on and on, through valleys that had re-echoed to the hoof-thunder of the riders of O'Connor of Offally, in the olden days. On still, to brave old Dunamase, and down and through the hills where O'Moore drew steel upon the Saxon; past Maryborough, called after the Tudor wife of Spanish Philip; through northern Ossory, where there were the *duns* of the MacCashins and the castles of the Fitzpatricks; and then, over a bend of the Slieve Blooms, into ferny hollows below Knockshigowna of the fairies, and down through the woods of Sharavogue into the chieftainry of Ely O'Carroll. Beautiful and ever beautiful. And, above all, it was Ireland—the homeland at last.

Maybe you remember the melodious lines in which Mary Elizabeth Blake tells of the loveliness which she dreamed of and found under Irish skies. I am thinking of them now, and I cannot deny myself the pleasure of writing them down:

Many and many a day have I longed for thy green-robed splendour
Thine eyes of the deep sea gray and thy soft love patient and tender—
For the croon of thy welcoming voice, and thy smiles, half joy and half sadness,
Soul of my soul rejoice, for this is the hour of thy gladness!

Sure if I never had heard
What land had given me birth,
And cradled the spirit's bird
On its first weak flight to earth;

If I never had heard the name of thy sorrow and strength divine,
Or felt in my pulses the flame of fire they had caught from thine;
I would know by this rapture alone which sweeps through me now like a flood,
That the Irish skies were my own, and my blood was the Irish blood.

Proud did I hold thy race,
Yet knew not what pride might dare;
Fair did I deem thy face,
Yet never once half so fair;
Like a dream with rich happiness fraught
That some happier dawn makes true,
Nothing was glad in my thought
But gladness still more in you—

Other lands look lovelier from far away. But Ireland never is so beautiful as when the eye rests

upon her face. You need never be afraid that you are flattering her while painting her from even your fondest memory.

That was all in my thoughts as I crossed the Brosna River into Munster, a few miles above its confluence with the Shannon, and left Leinster behind me, on my first ramble in Eirinn. I was in the valley of the Shannon for an hour, and it was like living in the past to wander leisurely along the Summer roads. The tall grass was waving in the South wind on the Annagh Callows, and the corn was of the softest green on all the slopes of the hills from Ballylea to Rathcabban. Out of the flaggers, beside the water, on the verge of the moor, a wild duck and three "flappers" rushed with frightened "quacking," and dived into the cool security of the pool under the leaves of the water lillies. Further away from the road, a water hen and her chickens were feeding in the sedge along the margin of the little lough, and when they caught sight of the intruder they took refuge in the deep shadows cast by a mountain ash. It brought back the stolen pleasures of the long-gone Summer days when more attention was given to bird-nesting, and the general study of bird life, and the life habits of every wild thing that moved on Irish ground, than parents and school teachers deemed proper.

Rathcabban was basking drowsily in the sun as I cycled past the schoolhouse. The village was quiet, and a policeman and a goose had the street all to themselves. I went to the shop and inquired for the homes of some old friends and found them out. But not all the friends were to the good in dear

Tipperary. Some of them were far away and some of them were dead. The survivors were clamorous for the suspension of my journey and a stay of a week. But I told them I was under vows to visit Lorrha Abbey that morning, and made other excuses for tearing myself away from them.

Soon after leaving them I crossed the track of what had once been the railway from Birr, on the border of Leinster, to Portumna, on the border of Connacht. This railway has been defunct for years. It passed through a fertile district. It tapped the Shannon Valley, linking it up with the central railway system. It could have been worked at a minimum of expense. Even if it did not give a dividend, mile by mile, its value as a feeder to the main line could not have been small. And yet the Great Southern and Western Railway of Ireland stopped work on this road. The tracks were left there to rust. The sleepers are rotted. The bridges and culverts are neglected. The line is utterly wrecked.

And all this happened in Ireland in the end of the nineteenth century! While other countries were building hundreds of miles of new roads, Ireland, under the blessings of a maternal English rule, saw a railway to die. While other countries were making laws to protect the people against the aggressions of railway companies, the English Government in Ireland allowed a band of capitalists to abandon a line which was necessary to the progress and prosperity of an important district. Why? Just because the company had failed to insert a clause regarding a guarantee fund from public

taxation in its charter. The Clara and Banagher Railroad, in another section of the Shannon Valley, does not pay a mile-by-mile dividend, but the same company which abandoned the Portumna road, condescends to keep this line open. Why? Just because in the charter there is a clause—an iniquitous clause, too—which guarantees that the mile-by-mile loss shall be made good out of a cess levied on the overtaxed people of the district. This cess is levied, I believe, upon the barony of Garrycastle, and amounts to over 6d. in the pound. In presenting their yearly bill to the taxpayers for the loss on the working of the Banagher and Clara Railway, the company never calculate the benefits received by the main line from this branch, which acts as a feeder to the trunk road.

A run of almost an hour took me to Lorrha, where the ancient Abbey of St. Ruadhan stood—a place fateful in the history of Ireland. It was here Aodh Guaire of Hy-Many took refuge after slaying the steward of Diarmid Mac Cerbhaill, Ard Righ of Tara. St. Ruadhan was the uncle of the fugitive, and when the officers of Diarmid arrested him, despite his claim of sanctuary, and when his uncle protested against the taking away by force of one who had been granted the protection of the abbey, war was virtually declared between the civil and ecclesiastical powers in Ireland. The cursing and the desertion and ruin of Tara followed. Lorrha was famous as a great monastic establishment long after the fall of Tara, but for centuries it has been, like Clonard and Clonfert, and many another great ecclesiastical foundation of the early days of the

Irish Church, silent and deserted. Gone are the cloisters and schools. There is nothing left but crumbling stones and grass-grown mounds and the graves of the dead.

After passing Lorrha you strike a lovely stretch of Munster—long, winding, shallow vales, fine tracts of tilled land, green pastures, too, and shady groves and woods; and all along the eastern and southern horizon stand the blue peaks of the guardian mountains—Ard-na-h-Eireann, the Keepers, Devil's Bit and Slieve Phelim. I covered mile after mile through this beautiful district until I found myself in ancient Ossory. The road was rising, rising, under the first swell of the hills, and the south wind had freshened to a stiff breeze, against which cycling had ceased to be a mild form of exercise. The sun was low, too, so I called a halt and shaped my course homeward by Roscrea.

It was in the old Monastery of Roscrea (Ross or wood of Crea) that the Book of Dimma, at present in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, was written. The monastery was founded by St. Cronan somewhere about the beginning of the seventh century. There is a legend in connection with the writing of the Book of Dimma which still lives around Roscrea. Dimma was a very skilful scribe, and St. Cronan employed him to produce a copy of the Gospels.

"I can only give you one day for the transcription," said Dimma, "as I have other work to do; so you need not expect me to produce a very beautiful copy in so short a time."

"It is morning now," said the saint, "so begin at once and write until sunset."

Dimma began to write, and the legend says that the light of the sun did not cease to shine around him for forty days and forty nights. By that time the Book of Dimma was finished. One of the Chieftains of Ely O'Carroll had a costly shrine made, in which to guard this beautiful manuscript. When the monastery was suppressed the Book of Dimma and its shrine were taken away by the monks. Some boys who were out rabbit-hunting found the book in 1789 in one of the crevices of Devil's Bit Mountain. It passed into the possession of a gentleman in Nenagh, and from him it went to Dr. Todd, who presented it to Trinity College. The old monastery in which it was written is a ruin, but close to Roscrea is a splendid new monastery of the Trappists, whose house at Mount Melleray is world-famous.

Mount St. Joseph, the monastery near Roscrea, is a most picturesquely situated place. It stands in a noble park, which was once known as Mount Heaton. The park and mansion came into the possession of the Trappists through the princely generosity of Count Moore, who purchased the estate after the death of its eccentric owner, Mr. Heaton This Mr. Heaton seems to have been a recluse, a misanthrope, and a worldling of the most selfish type.

"He was a bit of a rhymer, too," said a stalwart youth, who chatted with me about the last of the Heatons, as I cycled past the monastery.

"I never read any verse of his," I remarked, "nor do I remember to have heard his name in connection with poetry."

"Oh, I don't suppose he ever published any," said my informant, "but he made it, right enough. Mostly all the verses he used to make were about eating. I don't remember any of them very well, but one was something like this:

Bacon is bacon
And mutton is mutton,
  Not bad to eat.

Bacon is bacon
And mutton is mutton,
  But only beef is meat.

"I only remember one more—the one he made when he was dying. He made his servant lift him up in the bed, so that he could look out into the park and see the trees and everything. And says he:

Farewell beef,
And the cabbage leaf,
Farewell mutton.
And farewell bacon,
Oh! sweet Mount Heaton,
  Must I leave you?

"I don't think I have it off rightly, but that is more or less the run of it, like. He made dozens of others—all about eating and drinking and his money. But he had to go away, heels foremost, at last, and leave it all behind him."

The Trappists have turned the mansion into a monastery, and have added a magnificent church and other buildings, including an Irish-Ireland College. There is a guest house, the same as at Mount Melleray, and the hospitality of the Fathers is boundless. Mount St. Joseph is much frequented by men who go thither to make retreats. The monastery of Mount Melleray is also a haven for such penitents. People are to be met in both houses from all parts of the world—the United States, Australia, Africa, the Continent, South America, and from England and Scotland as well as Ireland. There is absolutely no charge. Guests may come and go in scores, and stay while there is room for them. The guest table is most hospitably served, although the Fathers themselves never eat meat except on Christmas Day. Every modern comfort is provided for visitors; and if they do not make voluntary contributions on leaving, no one asks them for a penny. The lay brothers of the order and some of the Fathers spend certain hours of the day in working in the fields. They have a model farm, and, in a material as well as in a spiritual sense, the monastery is a helpful, uplifting influence in the locality. It is also an Irish influence, for the Irish Trappists are intensely national, and many of them are Irish speakers.

"And are you a Gaelic Leaguer?" I asked of the fine young athlete, whose company I was enjoying along the shady road by the monastery demesne.

"Of course I am," he replied, laughingly; "why shouldn't I? Roscrea is in Ireland. We didn't think of that fact until lately, but now we see it

clearly enough. Do you know that in the convent the children are learning Irish, and Irish history, too? Oh, yes, we are Irish here!"

I asked him if he could tell me where the Battle of Roscrea was fought, and he told me that it was near the old abbey, where the great fair used to be held. It was in the days of the Danish invasions that the battle took place, between the years 943 and 950. Oilfinn, Chief of the Danes of Connacht, marched his hosts to Roscrea to plunder the rich merchants who were wont to assemble there from all parts of Ireland, and also from foreign countries, at the great fair held every year, according to the Abbe Mac Geoghegan, on the 29th of June, St. Peter and Paul's day. The news of the march of the Norsemen soon spread, and every man who attended the fair went armed. Instead of engaging in buying and selling they went out to meet the enemy in their thousands, and a terrible fight ensued. Oilfinn and 4,000 of his men were slain, and the Danes were utterly defeated.

Down the pleasant sloping country from Mount St. Joseph I cycled towards Knockshigowna. I was thinking of leaving my wheel by the wayside and climbing the storied hill to see the sun going down into the Shannon, when I rounded a bend in a shady hollow and came upon a cross-roads. There was a hospitable cross-roads house, and I halted in the "bawn" thereof. I got the loan of a stool from mine hostess and sat by the roadside and smoked and entered into conversation with a man who was seated on the grass eating watercress off a cabbage-leaf. It was difficult to draw him into

conversation at first, so preoccupied was he with his salad. Beside the cabbage-leaf, on the grass, lay a piece of brown paper containing a little salt, and he was paying the nicest attention to the quantities which he took with each bunch of cress.

"Is this the Birr Road?" I asked, by way of establishing social relations. He merely shook his head while he dipped a few sprigs of the watercress into the salt and turned the morsel round and round, shaking it daintily, and eyeing it with the air of an epicure before conveying it to his mouth. He wore a tall silk hat, bottle green with age and the stress of travel. He showed a frayed and yellow collar and the remnant of a black tie. His frock coat was tightly buttoned across his chest. His trousers were patched at the knees and frayed at the feet. His boots were in the last stages of decay, and were clamouring for the restfulness of the grave. At first I thought he might be a broken-down landlord. But I was mistaken. He was simply a tramp. He was not a tramp in the American sense, but he belonged to the consuming class all the same, and disclaimed all affiliation, fraternity and solidarity with the producers! He belonged apparently to the class known as beggarmen. He appeared a beggarman from his protruding toes to the crown of his sixteenth century hat. Such was evidently his rating in the economy of the universe. I felt easy in my mind once I had thus placed him, and my road to his confidence seemed clearer.

"Have you walked far to-day?" I asked.

He nodded, munching a bunch of salted cress, with every outward sign of enjoyment.

"You look like a man that has seen better days," I remarked, not that I believed he had, but merely to get him to talk.

"Do I now?" he asked with a sour grin, as he helped himself to another morsel of his repast.

"Yes," I said. "You do. Have you come down far in the world?"

"Would you think, now, that I ever followed a hunt?" he asked by way of reply.

"Certainly."

"Then, bedad, you're right, sir. So I did—many a one, too. But I went on foot, you understand, not on horseback."

"Oh, indeed!"

"A fact, and as for seein' better days, well, I don't know but I have. I was always a beggarman, anyhow, and my father and grandfather before me were the same, so I never fell in the world at all—unless maybe now and then of a fair night, when times was good and refreshments were flowin' about plentiful."

"And how do you find the times?" I enquired.

"Bad, bad, bad!" and he shook his head sadly. He said that a beggarman in Ireland now has a "poor" occupation in every sense of the word. It was once far better—one lived at his ease, and could support a large family, and have a full skin, from year's end to year's end. Now, unless, as in his own case, one had an old-established connection, it was difficult for a beggarman to make ends meet. And even with a good connection it was no easy

matter. He supposed that, if things continued to go on as they were going now, he would, sooner or later, be obliged to work or go to the poorhouse.

He was the only beggarman I met during the whole of a month. When I was a lad, the country was infested with them. I was glad to note the change that had taken place in this respect.

"It is not that the country is poorer nor it used to be," he exclaimed. "It's just that there isn't any feelin' in the people for a beggarman."

A run of a mile or so through the lengthening shadows brought me to a sharp hill, which I was obliged to negotiate on foot. As I gained the crest a whiff of the unpurchasable fragrance of new mown hay greeted me, and over the hedge to my right lay a big rye grass meadow in windrows. Four men were rolling the windrows into cocks, and the rustle and perfume of the yellowing hay came to the road, through the hush and calm of the sunset.

"God bless the work," I said.

"You, too," they answered cheerily.

"Have you a spare fork there?"

"Aye, have we," said one of them, using a quaint idiomatic affirmative of Northern Munster.

"Then here goes," I said, leaving my wheel on the roadside and leaping over the hedge.

It was for the sake of old times. I longed to renew my friendship with the ancient art of hay-making, and the four smiling haymakers were nothing loath. They regarded me in the light of a harmless patient, and when I tackled a windrow all by myself they said, encouragingly:

"'Deed it isn't the first time for you to take a fork in your hands, God bless you!"

Be it known unto all nations that during the Summer I took part in haymaking in nine different counties in the four provinces. I lent a hand at the saving of "new" and "old" meadow, blistered my hands, broke fork handles, made tramp cocks, and grass cocks and fork cocks, drank oatmeal water, and buttermilk; and, in a word, made myself thoroughly acquainted with the present aspects of Irish haymaking.

It has changed, and changed in some ways for the better. The romance of it has gone. That part of it went down into the past with the scythes and the advent of the hay rakes and tedders. The growing scarcity of labourers made machinery necessary. In the old days the hay was dried almost to a cinder—dried until it crackled when you took up a handful of it. It was as dry, in fact, as if it had been placed for hours on a kiln. When the ropes were made for the tramp cocks, the hay had to be wetted first in order to make the twisting of it possible. Now the hay is put into tramp cocks quite heavy.

We sat on the golden-tinted cocks near the road when the work was finished, and they told me about the harvest prospects, and about hares and foxes and many other things while the west grew rosy and shook out purple swathings to welcome the homing sun. They were fine hearty fellows, strong-limbed, clear-complexioned, bright-eyed, and as for their health, it seemed to come to them out of every stubble and grass-blade in all the magnificent

Photo by] **LOUGH GILL.** [Lawrence.

country-side. They were hurlers, they told me, forwards in the local team, and were proud of the fact. They were splendid children of the soil, and they were worthy of it. Their native sod could scarcely have been fairer. Green acres of rich pasture, hedged with white-thorn, woodbine, and wild rose, stretched out below us, brightened by greener cornfields and the luscious promise of root crops. Along the valley and half way up the opposite ridges ran heavy foliaged woods; and around the woods, and by the banks of a gleaming river, were fringes of soft moorland, heather-grown and fern-scented. Thrown against the olive shadows of the trees, and against the blending shade of sunlit verdure were thin wreaths of turf smoke, spread by many a white-washed homestead where the supper pots were boiling. The hush of evening fell around us, and through it, pulsing up along the slope bathed in the crimson glory of the hour, came the ringing laughter of some girls who were driving home their cows to the milking.

It was after sunset when I left the meadow and took my way along the wooded slopes to Ballybrit. It was the mystic gloaming—the dewy close of the lingering twilight—as I cycled along the road which led through tall rushes and luxuriant heather. It was night as I passed through Birr, and I shared the starlit country with the sleepless corncrakes as I made my way through the north of Ely O'Carroll, home to bed.

CHAPTER II.

Around Lough Gill—Knocknarea—Sligo—The Lake —The Hills—The Valley of O'Rourke—Drumahaire—O'Rourke's Table.

I had decided on a tour into northern Connacht, so with a mixture of "the white wind from the South and the brown wind from the West" on my shoulder, I pulled out on one of the main roads leading through Ely O'Carroll and faced for the Shannon. Lough Gill was my destination, and I shaped my course as follows:—Athlone, Roscommon, Boyle, Sligo, Drumahaire.

Had I hearkened to the oracular guidance of a road book, edited by a West Briton, which had cost me a shilling, I would have gone to Sligo by train, for, according to the book, the road from Dublin to Sligo is "an uninteresting route and road indifferent." But a month's experience had taught me that the most I could expect from this book was an occasional piece of unconscious humour.

The "uninteresting route" alluded to above is really one of the most interesting in all Ireland. It crosses the magnificent plain of Meath, passing close to Tara. It takes you past scores of historic and beautiful places in fair Westmeath of the lakes. It leads you over the most picturesque of the Longford uplands; and whether you decide to cross the Shannon at Lanesborough or at Carrick, it shows you the hills of Annaly of the O'Ferralls, and gives you the choice of a look at beautiful Lough Ree, or a ramble through the delightful country between Newtownforbes and Drumsna.

When you cross the Shannon the Sligo road takes you over the Connacht plains and brings you within sight of royal Cruachain. It leads you into Boyle, and thence through the Pass of the Curlews, or you have an alternative road to Sligo round the northern spur of the Curlews by the rock of Doon, and the shore of Lough Key and to Sligo by Knocknarea.

"An uninteresting route?" Not if you are Irish and know some of the history of your land, and feel some pleasure in standing beside the graves of heroes and on ground made sacred by their heroism. Not if you delight to see the hay-making, and the turf cutting, and in observing the simple, beautiful life of rural Ireland. Not if you feel at home among the boys and girls at the cross-roads in the evening time, or if you know how to enjoy a drink of milk and a chat with the old people across the half door, or on a stool beside the hearth. Not if you love the woods and the mantling glory of waving corn ripening in the sun, and the white, winding roads made cool on the hottest day by the shade of flower-laden hedges.

But if you are one of those tired and tiresome souls desirous only of treading in the footsteps of the cheap trippers who follow one another like sheep, if you have no eye of your own for the beautiful, and if you think it your duty to go out of your way to put money into the pockets of vampire railways, then in the name of all the Philistines and seoinini take the train, or stay away out of the country altogether, or go to some peepshow and surfeit your narrow photographic soul on "views."

The road over the Curlew Mountains from Boyle is a grand one. If you are an average roadster you can pedal up the greater part of the gradient. They tell a story in Boyle of a man who negotiated the mountains in night time without becoming aware of it. He said, when asked how he had found the roads, that they were all right, but that he thought he had met a sort of a long hill somewhere. He was either a champion rider or a humorist.

Anyhow the ordinary tourist will have to get off his machine for a few steep zigzags. The rest is nothing more formidable than a good tough climb. You can rest now and then and admire the spreading plains behind you to the eastward. You can see into Mayo and Galway to your right, and Boyle is just below you, the old abbey lifting its twelfth century gables over the trees. To your left is beautiful Lough Key.

A little higher up you come to the verge of the battlefield of the Curlews. They call it Deerpark or some such history-concealing name now. Ballaghboy is what the annalists call it. You can see the stone erected on the spot where Clifford, the English general, fell. You can see where the uncaged Eagle of the North prepared for his swoop, and the heart within you leaps as your eye follows adown the slope the line of his victorious onset. God's rest and peace be with your soul, Red Hugh! You were a sensible, practical patriot, although there is no big tower one hundred and goodness knows how many feet high erected to your memory on Ireland's ground. And although you had no blatant press to give you high-sounding names and sing your

praises to the world, you believed that liberty was worth the best blood in your veins, and you did not waste breath on windy resolutions. And when you raised your hand, a bouchal, it was not the everlasting hat that you held out in it to the gaze of the nations, for it had that in it which was worthy of Ireland and of you. 'Twas something that gleamed and reddened and blazed and that flashed the light of wisdom and duty into the souls of manly men.

After passing Ballaghboy the road leads upward into the fastnesses of the Curlews, where for a while the world is shut off. The heath-clad summits of the peaks hem you in. For about a mile you ride in this solitude and then suddenly there is a turn and the world comes back again. Below you the valleys and woods are alternating in the near distance. In front of you is a green hillside dotted with farm houses. There, too, is Lough Arrough, and beyond it, away in the hazy distance, is the purple bulk of Slieveanierin and the gray masses of Knocknarea and Benbulben. Ten minutes will bring you to the town of Ballinafad. The road from here to Sligo is a grand one for the cyclist. It is smooth and level nearly all the way.

After a few miles of this pleasant road you come to an ancient-looking demesne. The timber is old and lofty, the wall along the roadside is moss-grown, the undergrowth beneath the oaks and pines is thick and tangled. This is the Folliat or Folliard estate. It is where the scene of "Willie Reilly" is laid. Here lived the "great Squire Folliard" and his lovely daughter—the heroine of one of the most

popular of Anglo-Irish love tales, and the subject of a ballad that has been sung in many lands:

Oh! rise up, Willie Reilly, and come along with me!

The suggestion of the metre must have come to the balladist in the lilt of some old traditional air of Connacht. I have nearly always heard it sung in the Irish traditional style—the style which lived on even after the Irish language had fallen into disuse. I have heard it sung in two hemispheres—by the Winter firesides of Leinster and under the *paraiso* trees around the homes of the Pampas. I had followed it around the world, through the turf smoke and bone smoke—through the midges and mosquitoes and fire-flies. I was glad to find that I had run it to earth at last, so to speak.

There is a gloom over the Folliat demesne now. The shadow of a great sorrow is on it. A few years ago a daughter of the house went out on the lake in a boat to gather water lilies for her affianced lover, who was returning that evening to her after a long absence. She was drowned. They were to have been married in a day or two. The place has never been the same since then.

Collooney was meant by nature for great things. The river flowing by the town supplies it with immense water power. Under the rule of a free people, Collooney would be an important manufacturing centre. At present it is a mere village, struggling to keep the rooftrees standing. There are various mills beside the river, some of them, I fear, silenced forever. There is a woollen factory which is evidently trying conclusions with the shoddy from foreign

mills. It is engaged in an uphill fight, but I hope it is winning. After passing the woollen factory, you cross the bridge, and, skirting a big hill, you drop down on the Sligo road, which takes you through one of the battlefields of '98.

The battle was fought close to the town. On the 5th of September, 1798, the advance guard of Humbert's little army arrived at Collooney from Castlebar. Colonel Vereker, of the Limerick militia, was there from Sligo with some infantry, cavalry and artillery. He was beaten back to Sligo, and he lost his artillery. Humbert then marched to Drumahaire and thence towards Manorhamilton, but suddenly wheeling he made for Longford to join the Granard men. Ballinamuck followed. Bartholomew Teeling and Matthew Tone (brother of Theobald Wolfe Tone) were among the Irish prisoners who surrendered with Humbert to Lord Cornwallis. They were executed a few days afterward in Dublin.

Close beside the road on a rocky hill they have erected a monument to Teeling. The statue, which is heroic in its expression, looks toward the "Races of Castlebar" and reminds one of that splendid day. One uplifted hand grasps a battle-flag. The face is a poem, grandly eloquent in its chiselling. You think you can catch the thought that was in the sculptor's mind. You can feel that his aim was to represent his hero looking out in fiery appeal and reproach over the sleeping West!

Sligo should by right be a great Irish seaport town, but if it had to live by its shipping interests it would starve in a week. Like Galway, it has had such a dose of British fostering and legislation that

it seems to be afraid of ships, and the ships seem to be afraid of it. The city lives independently of its harbour, which it holds in reserve for brighter and greater days. There are, as far as one can judge, three Sligos—the Irish Sligo, the ascendancy Sligo and the Sligo which straddles between ascendancy and nationalism. The Gaelic League is strong in the city, and one of the hardest workers in the West, when I was there, was Father Hynes.

Sligo is very picturesquely situated. Knocknarea guards it on one side and Benbulbin on the other. The hills which face the city to the northward are very beautiful, and beyond and above their fresh verdure are the rocky heights that beat off the keen and angry winds from the Atlantic. You ride down into the streets from a hill which overtops the steeples, and it is only when you come into the suburbs that you can see the bay. Clear and calm it looks from the Ballysodare road, but, alas! not a smoke cloud on the whole of it, not a sail in view, not a masthead over the roofs along the water front. The harbour is not, of course, entirely deserted. A steamer or a sailing ship comes in now and then. The same thing happens in Galway.

But I am not comparing the two cities, because there is no comparison between them. Galway drags on an existence. Sligo is very much alive. Galway went to the bad when its ocean trade was killed. Sligo is able to maintain itself by doing business with the district in which it is situated. Behind Galway there was no populous and fertile land near enough to be a support to business.

Behind Sligo are the valleys which support a relatively thriving rural population.

You can spend a very pleasant day in and around Sligo, visiting places of historical interest or picturesque beauty. It was once a war-scourged district, and the scars are still there. The hills around have echoed to a hundred battle cries, some of which were raised for Ireland. At Ballysodare you will find waterfalls that are beautiful even to people who have seen photographs of Niagara and read of cascades in several fashionable countries. There is a ruined castle of the O'Connors, too, which has a history. It was shot to pieces in the days when Connacht was making its last fight for freedom, and it was never rebuilt. It was one of the outposts of Sligo and saw many a bloody fray in its time.

The sea runs in to Ballysodare and makes a bay around which you have to cycle to Knocknarea. Soon after coming to the slope of the hill you meet one of the queerest, wildest and most beautiful of glens. They call it after the mountain.

It is a wondrously romantic freak of nature, planted there in a cleft of the rock and walled off from the world, as if the Great Mother meant to lock it up and hide it away for her own use. It is thickly wooded, narrow and deep. The trees meet over the path in places, and the ferns touch you as you pass. The spirits of Knocknarea must love it. One can fancy how they made it their own centuries ago. A mystic poet might dream his life away in it, holding communion with the hero-dead of Connacht. It would also be a grand place for a botanist, or "a man on his keeping," or an amateur distiller.

When you succeed in driving yourself out of the glen you ought to climb the mountain, on the top of which there is a cairn. There are people who will tell you that Queen Meave was buried there and not at Cruachain. I think they are in error. Perhaps it is one of the earlier kings of pagan Ireland that sleeps on Knocknarea.

Be that as it may, however, the cairn is a resting-place fit for a monarch. It looks down on wide Tir Fiachra, where dwelt "the music-loving hosts of fierce engagements." Away to northward and eastward and southward are mountain and valley and river and lake and woodland. To the westward rolls the thundering ocean. The mountain has no partner in its glory. It stands proudly over the rocky coast in solitary grandeur. The mourners who erected the burial mound on its stately summit could not have chosen a more royal throne for their kingly dead. They could see the sun-god smiling on it in the morning time before any other peak was crimsoned by his touch, and they caught the last flash of his golden spear upon it as he sank to sleep in the west. The fleecy shreds of vapour which float around it in the Summer time adorn it like some silken scarf of gauze blown against the curls of a woman. The angry clouds of Autumn and Winter cap it. The lightning darts its fiery tongues upon it. The thunder bellows over it. And if the people of Tir Fiachra regarded all these things as being symbolic of the sunny or playful or tempestuous moods of their great one, it would only have been quite natural, for they were men and women of epic minds. Their lives were epic. Their fate was epic. Their history is epic.

And about Knocknarea itself there is an epic suggestiveness which you cannot miss if you climb the mountain. You cannot keep your hold upon the present while you are up there. You may smoke twentieth century tobacco and look down on twentieth century towns and railways and roads, but your thoughts are far away.

You can fancy the dead leader from the cairn on the summit gazing prophetically northward across Lough Gill and Brefney and Lough Erne into Ulster, or eastward toward Cruachain and Tara. You wonder is the prophesying all over. Did it all end, was it all fulfilled, in the long ago? Or has a portion of it still to weave itself into form, now that so many bright gleams of the old temperament are kindling in the dreamers of our time?

A bearded stranger found me standing on a bridge in Sligo one morning and proposed to take me up Lough Gill in a boat. I asked him some questions in geography, and found his mind was virgin soil in this respect. All he could tell me was that the water underneath the bridge led to the lake, and that he was a boatman of vast experience and of the strictest honesty.

I asked him some questions in local history, and was informed that the history of Sligo is in books. So he had been told. None of the said history was in his possession, nor had he ever seen it, but he could positively assure me that his personal honesty was above suspicion, and that his boat was comfortable and safe, as the Mayor himself could testify. He offered to take me to Drumahaire and back for six shillings. I said that I preferred to

ride. This he solemnly told me was impossible. I knew better, for I had ridden it some weeks previously. But I did not tell this to the champion boatman of Sligo. I merely bade him good morning and said that I would mention him to my friends. He then offered to take me to Drumahaire and back for five shillings. I shook my head. "For four, then," he called after me. I made no sign. "For three," he said, desperately. He drew a blank every time. Then he followed me and offered to tell me the best road. I knew it. Then in despair he turned away and left me to my fate.

I do not know if there are any other Lough Gill boatmen in Sligo. If there are, they do not seem to be overworked, for you seldom see a boat upon the lake. And yet it must be a delightful journey by water from the city to Drumahaire. The river which connects Lough Gill with the sea is short, but it is very beautiful. It flows between wooded hills and past smooth green lawns, and when it opens on the lake it is a new and abiding delight.

Opposite Drumahaire, which is some distance away from the water, another river disembogues. You ascend this stream for about a mile until you meet a sort of jetty. Here you disembark, for you are within a few minutes' walk of the Abbey Hotel. Such is one way to Drumahaire. The way of the cyclist is either along the northern or southern shore, around the lake. If you start by the northerly road you return to Sligo by the route which touches the southern shore of the lake. If you start by the southern road you return by the northern. A day will take you round Lough Gill comfortably. It is

a run of about twenty miles—Irish miles, of course.

As you leave Sligo behind you and strike southward in the direction of Boyle the country looks bleak. It looks bleaker still as you wheel to the left at a cross-roads outside the city. The land is poor and the bare rock asserts itself over the clinging heather on the hills near the road. But have a little patience. Presently you come to a turn and creep down a steep incline, and then Lough Gill in all its loveliness and freshness and grandeur bursts upon your view. The change is so rapid and complete that for the first few moments you are bewildered.

But for goodness sake let us not hasten to compare it with anything or any place else. Let us take it on its own merits. The practice of comparing one beauty spot on this earth with another is hackneyed and, in the abstract, somewhat sickening. "The Switzerland of Ireland" is a cry to be abhorred. So is "How like Geneva!" So is "How suggestive of the English lake country!" And another parrot cry is "Oh! dear! How like the Riviera!" You cheapen Irish scenery when you rush into such comparisons. There is none of it that you can flatter by calling it German or Italian or French or English names. This land of ours revels in beauty. She is a favoured child of nature; and I pity any one born of her who would not prefer her loveliness to that of any other land, for it is second to none.

The change of scenery from the rather wild and barren country through which you passed after leaving the Boyle road opens full upon your view just when you have descended into the lake valley

sufficiently to bring you on a level with the tops of the trees that cover the hills around the shore. Above the trees grow the heather and fern, and the weather-stained rocks crown the summits. Below you is the western end of the lake studded with islands, and each island is like a big hillock of verdure, so thickly do the trees grow together. In the Autumn, when the different tints come on the foliage, each islet looks like a big nosegay set in the water, and the heather above the timber belt on the hills is covered with purple bloom.

The surface of the lake is smooth enough to reflect everything—the blue sky and the fleecy clouds and the verdant glory of the trees and ferns and meadows and the royal trappings of the heath, and the browns and greys of the beetling crags. All these tints mingle in the depths, gilded by the glad sunshine that fondly caresses them all. A rivulet murmurs and laughs softly to you as it tumbles down from the rocks under the cool shade of the briars and ferns. There are bird songs in the trees, and a rabbit scuttles swiftly across the road, and you hear the tap, tap, tap of the thrush coming from the forest gloom beyond as he cracks a snail upon a stone and prepares his breakfast. You are alone with nature, and you enjoy it. But do not stop just yet.

Ride down the road to the water and look for a few moments up at the hills and along the lake between the islands. Then follow the road again upward through the woods until you come to a place where a broad pathway leads into the brush under the hazels. Leave your bicycle here—no one

will meddle with it, even if they pass the way—and take the path which winds steeply up between the tree trunks at right angles to the road. The hart tongues, and the tall fronds of the wood ferns, and the wild violets and bluebells, brush your insteps; the hazel branches rustle against your head and shoulders, and the dried twigs snap under your feet.

Upward you bend your way across the little patches of light which the sun throws on the ground, as he peeps down through the branches of the oaks and pines, until you come to the level and wooded summit of the hill. You walk out on a rocky terrace and stand right over the lake, hundreds of feet over the pebbly strand which shines below you. This terrace gives you a splendid cross-view of Lough Gill.

The western and south-western creeks and bays are all in sight. You are far over the tree-tops of the islands. You can see the wide lawns of a park sloping downward to the river that flows on to Sligo and the farmsteads of the distant hills beyond which the Atlantic frets and swells. Here, indeed, you may rest and dream, or smoke and think of things. This is beauty undefiled, and you have it all to yourself. No tripper agency has yet discovered it; no railway company has yet fumigated it with coal smoke; no restaurant tout has yet daubed it with advertisements.

But you must not stay here for ever and ever, nor even for hours and hours. You have only just entered the charmed district of Lough Gill as yet, and there are many miles of it still to be seen.