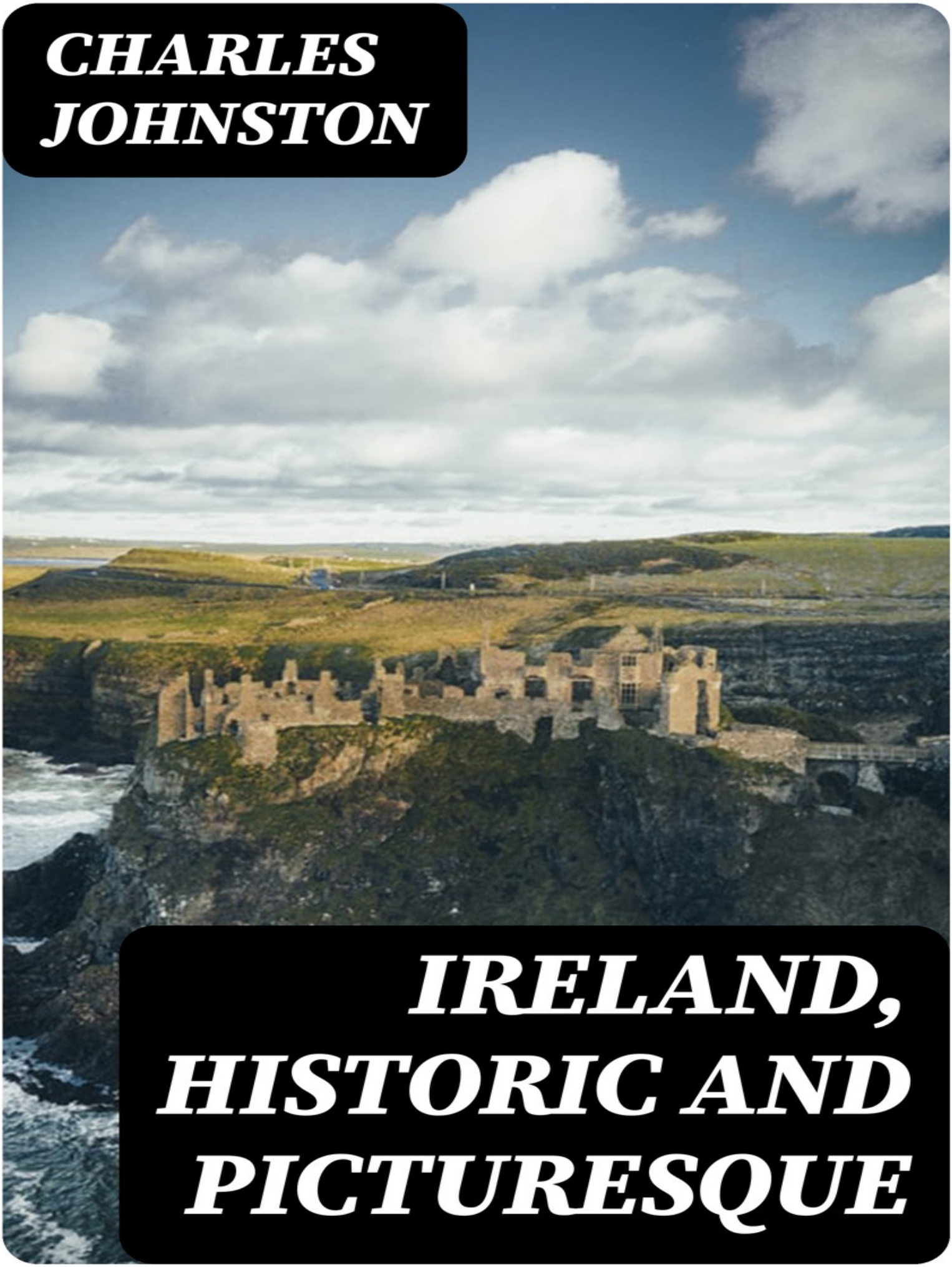
CHARLES JOHNSTON



IRELAND, HISTORIC AND PICTURESQUE

Charles Johnston

Ireland, Historic and Picturesque

EAN 8596547332916

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

IRELAND.

Table of Contents

I.

Table of Contents

VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE.

Table of Contents

Here is an image by which you may call up and remember the natural form and appearance of Ireland:

Think of the sea gradually rising around her coasts, until the waters, deepened everywhere by a hundred fathoms, close in upon the land. Of all Ireland there will now remain visible above the waves only two great armies of islands, facing each other obliquely across a channel of open sea. These two armies of islands will lie in ordered ranks, their lines stretching from northeast to southwest; they will be equal in size, each two hundred miles along the front, and seventy miles from front to rear. And the open sea between, which divides the two armies, will measure seventy miles across.

Not an island of these two armies, as they lie thus obliquely facing each other, will rise as high as three thousand feet; only the captains among them will exceed a thousand; nor will there be great variety in their forms. All the islands, whether north or south, will have gently

rounded backs, clothed in pastures nearly to the crest, with garments of purple heather lying under the sky upon their ridges. Yet for all this roundness of outline there will be, towards the Atlantic end of either army, a growing sternness of aspect, a more sombre ruggedness in the outline of the hills, with cliffs and steep ravines setting their brows frowning against the deep.

Hold in mind the image of these two obliquely ranged archipelagoes, their length thrice their breadth, seaming the blue of the sea, and garmented in dark green and purple under the sunshine; and, thinking of them thus, picture to yourself a new rising of the land, a new withdrawal of the waters, the waves falling and ever falling, till all the hills come forth again, and the salt tides roll and ripple away from the valleys, leaving their faces for the winds to dry; let this go on till the land once more takes its familiar form, and you will easily call up the visible image of the whole.

As you stand in the midst of the land, where first lay the channel of open sea, you will have, on your northern horizon, the beginning of a world of purple-outlined hills, outliers of the northern mountain region, which covers the upper third of the island. On all sides about you, from the eastern sea to the western ocean, you will have the great central plain, dappled with lakes and ribbed with silver rivers, another third of the island. Then once more, to the south, you will have a region of hills, the last third of Ireland, in size just equal to the northern mountains or the central plain.

The lines of the northern hills begin with the basalt buttresses of Antrim and the granite ribs of Down, and pass

through northern Ulster and Connacht to the headlands of Mayo and Galway. Their rear is held by the Donegal ranges, keeping guard against the blackness of the northern seas.

The plain opens from the verge of these hills; the waters that gather on its pleasant pastures and fat fields, or among the green moss tracts of its lowlands, flow eastward by the Boyne or southwestward by the Shannon to the sea.

Then with the granite mountains of Dublin and Wicklow begin the southern hills, stretching through south Leinster and Munster to the red sandstone ridges of Cork and Kerry, our last vantage-ground against the Atlantic.

Finally, encircling all, is the perpetual presence of the sea, with its foaming, thunderous life or its days of dreamy peace; around the silver sands or furrowed cliffs that gird the island our white waves rush forever, murmuring the music of eternity.

Such is this land of Eiré, very old, yet full of perpetual youth; a thousand times darkened by sorrow, yet with a heart of living gladness; too often visited by evil and pale death, yet welling ever up in unconquerable life,--the youth and life and gladness that thrill through earth and air and sky, when the whole world grows beautiful in the front of Spring.

For with us Spring is like the making of a new world in the dawn of time. Under the warm wind's caressing breath the grass comes forth upon the meadows and the hills, chasing dun Winter away. Every field is newly vestured in young corn or the olive greenness of wheat; the smell of the earth is full of sweetness. White daisies and yellow dandelions star all our pastures; and on the green ruggedness of every hillside,

or along the shadowed banks of every river and every silver stream, amid velvet mosses and fringes of new-born ferns, in a million nooks and crannies throughout all the land, are strewn dark violets; and wreaths of yellow primroses with crimped green leaves pour forth a remote and divine fragrance; above them, the larches are dainty with new greenery and rosy tassels, and the young leaves of beech and oak quiver with fresh life.

Still the benignance of Spring pours down upon us from the sky, till the darkening fields are hemmed in between barriers of white hawthorn, heavy with nectar, and twined with creamy honeysuckle, the finger-tips of every blossom coral-red. The living blue above throbs with the tremulous song of innumerable larks; the measured chant of cuckoos awakens the woods; and through the thickets a whole world's gladness sings itself forth from the throat of thrush and blackbird. Through the whole land between the four seas benediction is everywhere; blue-bells and the rosy fingers of heath deck the mountain-tops, where the grouse are crooning to each other among the whins; down the hillsides into every valley pour gladness and greenness and song; there are flowers everywhere, even to the very verge of the whispering sea. There, among the gray bent-spikes and brackens on the sandhills, primroses weave their yellow wreaths; and little pansies, golden and blue and purple, marshal their weird eyes against the spears of dark blue hyacinths, till the rich tribute of wild thyme makes peace between them.

The blue sky overhead, with its flocks of sunlit clouds, softly bends over the gentle bosom of the earth. A living

spirit throbs everywhere, palpable, audible, full of sweetness and sadness immeasurable--sadness that is only a more secret joy.

Then the day grows weary, making way for the magic of evening and the oncoming dark with its mystery. The tree-stems redden with the sunset; there is a chill sigh in the wind; the leaves turn before it, burnished against the purple sky. As the gloom rises up out of the earth, bands of dark red gather on the horizon, seaming the clear bronze of the sky, that passes upward into olive-color, merging in dark blue overhead. The sun swings down behind the hills, and purple darkness comes down out of the sky; the red fades from the tree-stems, the cloud-colors die away; the whole world glimmers with the fading whiteness of twilight. Silence gathers itself together out of the dark, deepened, not broken, by the hushing of the wind among the beech-leaves, or the startled cluck of a blackbird, or a wood-pigeon's soft murmur, as it dreams in the silver fir.

Under the brown wings of the dark, the night throbs with mystic presences; the hills glimmer with an inward life; whispering voices hurry through the air. Another and magical land awakes in the dark, full of a living restlessness; sleepless as the ever-moving sea. Everywhere through the night-shrouded woods, the shadowy trees seem to interrupt their secret whispers till you are gone past. There is no sense of loneliness anywhere, but rather a host of teeming lives on every hand, palpable though hidden, remote from us though touching our lives, calling to us through the gloom with wordless voices, inviting us to enter and share

with them the mystical life of this miraculous earth, great mother of us all, The dark is full of watching eyes.

Summer with us is but a brighter Spring, as our Winter only prolongs the sadness of Autumn. So our year has but two moods, a gay one and a sad one. Yet each tinges the other--the mists of Autumn veiling the gleam of Spring--Spring smiling through the grief of Autumn. When the sad mood comes, stripping the trees of their leaves, and the fields of their greenness, white mists veil the hills and brood among the fading valleys. A shiver runs through the air, and the cold branches are starred with tears. A poignant grief is over the land, an almost desolation,--full of unspoken sorrow, tongue-tied with unuttered complaint. All the world is lost and forlorn, without hope or respite. Everything is given up to the dirges of the moaning seas, the white shrouds of weeping mist. Wander forth upon the uplands and among the lonely hills and rock-seamed sides of the mountains, and you will find the same sadness everywhere: a grieving world under a grieving sky. Quiet desolation hides among the hills, tears tremble on every brown grass-blade, white mists of melancholy shut out the lower world.

Whoever has not felt the poignant sadness of the leafless days has never known the real Ireland; the sadness that is present, though veiled, in the green bravery of Spring, and under the songs of Summer. Nor have they ever known the real Ireland who have not divined beneath that poignant sadness a heart of joy, deep and perpetual, made only keener by that sad outward show.

Here in our visible life is a whisper and hint of our life invisible; of the secret that runs through and interprets so

much of our history. For very much of our nation's life has been like the sadness of those autumn days,--a tale of torn leaves, of broken branches, of tears everywhere. Tragedy upon tragedy has filled our land with woe and sorrow, and, as men count success, we have failed of it, and received only misery and deprivation. He has never known the true Ireland who does not feel that woe. Yet, more, he knows not the real Ireland who cannot feel within that woe the heart of power and joy,--the strong life outlasting darkest night,--the soul that throbs incessantly under all the calamities of the visible world, throughout the long tragedy of our history.

This is our secret: the life that is in sorrow as in joy; the power that is not more in success than in failure--the one soul whose moods these are, who uses equally life and death.

For the tale of our life is mainly tragedy. And we may outline now the manner in which that tale will be told. We shall have, first, a long, dim dawn,--mysterious peoples of the hidden past coming together to our land from the outlying darkness. A first period, which has left abundant and imperishable traces everywhere among our hills and valleys, writing a large history in massive stone, yet a history which, even now, is dim as the dawn it belongs to. What can be called forth from that Archaic Darkness, in the backward and abysm of Time, we shall try to evoke; drawing the outlines of a people who, with large energies in our visible world, toiled yet more for the world invisible; a people uniform through the whole land and beyond it, along many neighboring shores; a people everywhere building; looking back into a long past; looking forward through the

mists of the future. A people commemorating the past in a form that should outlast the future. A people undertaking great enterprises for mysterious ends; whose works are everywhere among us, to this day, imperishable in giant stone; yet a people whose purposes are mysterious to us, whose very name and tongue are quite unknown. Their works still live all around us in Ireland, spread evenly through the four provinces, a world of the vanished past enduring among us into the present; and, so mightily did these old builders work, and with such large simplicity, that what they built will surely outlast every handiwork of our own day, and endure through numberless to-morrows, bridging the morning and evening twilight of our race.

After this Archaic Dawn we shall find a mingling of four races in Ireland, coming together from widely separated homes, unless one of the four be the descendant of the archaic race, as well it may be. From the surging together of these four races we shall see, in almost pre-historic times, the growth of a well-knit polity; firm principalities founded, strong battles fought, a lasting foundation of law. In this Second Epoch, every thing that in the first was dim and vague grows firm in outline and defined. Names, places, persons,--we know them all as if they were of to-day. This is the age which flowered in the heroic days of Emain of Maca, Emain 'neath the beech-trees, the citadel of northeastern Ireland. Here we shall find the court of Fergus mac Roeg, a man too valiant, too passionate, too generous to rule altogether wisely; his star darkened by the gloomy genius of Concobar his stepson, the evil lover of ill-fated Deirdré. Cuculain, too, the war-loving son of Sualtam, shall rise

again,--in whom one part of our national genius finds its perfect flower. We shall hear the thunder of his chariot, at the Battle of the Headland of the Kings, when Meave the winsome and crafty queen of Connacht comes against him, holding in silken chains of her tresses the valiant spirit of Fergus. The whole life of that heroic epoch, still writ large upon the face of the land, shall come forth clear and definite; we shall stand by the threshold of Cuculain's dwelling, and move among the banquet-halls of Emain of Maca. We shall look upon the hills and valleys that Meave and Deirdré looked on, and hear the clash of spear and shield at the Ford of the river,--and this even though we must go back two thousand years.

To this will follow a Third Epoch, where another side of Ireland's genius will write itself in epic all across the land, with songs for every hillside, and stories for every vale and grove. Here our more passionate and poetic force will break forth in the lives of Find, son of Cumal, the lord of warriors; in his son Ossin, most famous bard of the western lands, and Ossin's son Oscar, before whose might even the fiends and sprites cowered back dismayed. As the epoch of Cuculain shows us our valor finding its apotheosis, so shall we find in Find and Ossin and Oscar the perfect flower of our genius for story and song; for romantic life and fine insight into nature; for keen wit and gentler humor. The love of nature, the passion for visible beauty, and chiefly the visible beauty of our land, will here show itself clearly,--a sense of nature not merely sensuous, but thrilling with hidden and mystic life. We shall find such perfection in this more emotional and poetic side of Irish character as will leave

little for coming ages to add. In these two early epochs we shall see the perfecting of the natural man; the moulding of rounded, gracious and harmonious lives, inspired with valor and the love of beauty and song.

Did our human destiny stop there, with the perfect life of individual men and women, we might well say that these two epochs of Ireland contain it all; that our whole race could go no further. For no man lived more valiant than Cuculain, more generous than Fergus, more full of the fire of song than Ossin, son of Find. Nor amongst women were any sadder than Deirdré and Grania; craftier than Meave, more winsome than Nessa the mother of Concobar. Perfected flowers of human life all of them,--if that be all of human life. So, were this all, we might well consent that with the death of Oscar our roll of history might close; there is nothing to add that the natural man could add.

But where the perfecting of the natural man ends, our truer human life begins--the life of our ever-living soul. The natural man seeks victory; he seeks wealth and possessions and happiness; the love of women, and the loyalty of followers. But the natural man trembles in the face of defeat, of sorrow, of subjection; the natural man cannot raise the black veil of death.

Therefore for the whole world and for our land there was needed another epoch, a far more difficult lesson,--one so remote from what had been of old, that even now we only begin to understand it. To the Ireland that had seen the valor of Cuculain, that had watched the wars of Fergus,--to the Ireland that listened to the deeds of Find and the songs of Ossin,--came the Evangel of Galilee, the darkest yet

brightest message ever brought to the children of earth. If we rightly read that Evangel, it brought the doom of the natural man, and his supersession by the man immortal; it brought the death of our personal perfecting and pride, and the rising from the dead of the common soul, whereby a man sees another self in his neighbor; sees all alike in the one Divine.

Of this one Divine, wherein we all live and live forever, pain is no less the minister than pleasure; nay, pain is more its minister, since pleasure has already given its message to the natural man. Of that one Divine, sorrow and desolation are the messengers, alike with joy and gladness; even more than joy and gladness, for the natural man has tasted these. Of that one Divine, black and mysterious death is the servant, not less than bright life; and life we had learned of old in the sunshine.

IN THE DARGLE, CO. WICKLOW.

There came, therefore, to Ireland, as to a land cherished for enduring purposes, first the gentler side, and then the

sterner, of the Galilean message. First, the epoch almost idyllic which followed after the mission of Patrick; the epoch of learning and teaching the simpler phrases of the Word. Churches and schools rose everywhere, taking the place of fort and embattled camp. Chants went up at morning and at evening, with the incense of prayer, and heaven seemed descended upon earth. Our land, which had stood so high in the ranks of valor and romance, now rose not less eminent for piety and fervid zeal, sending forth messengers and ministers of the glad news to the heathen lands of northern and central Europe, and planting refuges of religion within their savage bounds. Beauty came forth in stone and missal, answering to the beauty of life it was inspired by; and here, if anywhere upon earth through a score of centuries, was realized the ideal of that prayer for the kingdom, as in heaven, so on earth. Here, again, we have most ample memorials scattered all abroad throughout the land; we can call up the whole epoch, and make it stand visible before us, visiting every shrine and sacred place of that saintly time, seeing, with inner eyes, the footsteps of those who followed that path, first traced out by the shores of Gennesaret.

Once more, if the kingdom come upon earth were all of the message, we might halt here; for here forgiveness and gentle charity performed their perfect work, and learning was present with wise counsel to guide willing feet in the way. Yet this is not all; nor, if we rightly understand that darkest yet brightest message, are we or is mankind destined for such an earthly paradise; our kingdom is not of this world. Here was another happiness, another success; yet not in that happiness nor in that success was hid the

secret; it lay far deeper. Therefore we find that morning with its sunshine rudely clouded over, its promise swept away in the black darkness of storms. Something more than holy living remained to be learned; there remained the mystery of failure and death--that death which is the doorway to our real life. Therefore upon our shores broke wave after wave of invasion, storm after storm of cruelest oppression and degradation. In the very dust was our race ground down, destitute, afflicted, tormented, according to prophecy and promise. Nor was that the end. Every bitterness that the heart of man can conceive, that the heart of man can inflict, that the heart of man can endure, was poured into our cup, and we drained it to the dregs. Of that saddest yet most potent time we shall record enough to show not only what befell through our age of darkness, but also, so far as may be, what miraculous intent underlay it, what promise the darkness covered, of our future light; what golden rays of dawn were hidden in our gloom.

Finally, from all our fiery trials we shall see the genius of our land emerge, tried indeed by fire, yet having gained fire's purity; we shall see that genius beginning, as yet with halting speech, to utter its most marvelous secret of the soul of man. We shall try at least to gain clear sight of our great destiny, and thereby of the like destiny of universal man.

For we cannot doubt that what we have passed through, all men and all nations either have passed through already, or are to pass through in the time to come. There is but one divine law, one everlasting purpose and destiny for us all. And if we see other nations now entering that time of

triumph which passed for us so long ago, that perfecting of the natural man, with his valor and his song, we shall with fear and reverence remember that before them also lie the dark centuries of fiery trial; the long night of affliction, the vigils of humiliation and suffering. The one Divine has not yet laid aside the cup that holds the bitter draught,--the drinking of which comes ever before the final gift of the waters of life. What we passed through, they shall pass through also; what we suffered, they too shall suffer. Well will it be with them if, like us, they survive the fierce trial, and rise from the fire immortal, born again through sacrifice.

Therefore I see in Ireland a miraculous and divine history, a life and destiny invisible, lying hid within her visible life. Like that throbbing presence of the night which whispers along the hills, this diviner whisper, this more miraculous and occult power, lurks in our apparent life. From the very gray of her morning, the children of Ireland were preoccupied with the invisible world; it was so in the darkest hours of our oppression and desolation; driven from this world, we took refuge in that; it was not the kingdom of heaven upon earth, but the children of earth seeking a refuge in heaven. So the same note rings and echoes through all our history; we live in the invisible world. If I rightly understand our mission and our destiny, it is this: To restore to other men the sense of that invisible; that world of our immortality; as of old our race went forth carrying the Galilean Evangel. We shall first learn, and then teach, that not with wealth can the soul of man be satisfied; that our enduring interest is not here but there, in the unseen, the hidden, the immortal, for whose purposes exist all the

visible beauties of the world. If this be our mission and our purpose, well may our fair mysterious land deserve her name: Inis Fail, the Isle of Destiny.

THE GREAT STONE MONUMENTS.

Table of Contents

II.

Table of Contents

THE GREAT STONE MONUMENTS.

Table of Contents

Westward from Sligo--Town of the River of Shells--a tongue of land runs toward the sea between two long bays. Where the two bays join their waters, a mountain rises

precipitous, its gray limestone rocks soaring sheer upwards, rugged and formidable. Within the shadow of the mountain is hidden a wonderful glen--a long tunnel between cliffs, densely arched over with trees and fringed with ferns; even at midday full of a green gloom. It is a fitting gateway to the beauty and mystery of the mountain.

Slowly climbing by stony ways, the path reaches the summit, a rock table crowned with a pyramid of loose boulders, heaped up in olden days as a memorial of golden-haired Maeve. From the dead queen's pyramid a view of surpassing grandeur and beauty opens over sea and land, mingled valley and hill. The Atlantic stretches in illimitable blue, curved round the rim of the sky, a darker mirror of the blue above. It is full of throbbing silence and peace. Across blue fields of ocean, and facing the noonday brightness of the sun, rise the tremendous cliffs of Slieve League, gleaming with splendid colors through the shimmering air; broad bands of amber and orange barred with deeper red; the blue weaves beneath them and the green of the uplands above.

The vast amber wall rises out of the ocean, and passes eastward in a golden band till it merges in the Donegal highlands with their immeasurable blue. Sweeping round a wide bay, the land drawls nearer again, the far-away blue darkening to purple, and then to green and brown. The sky is cut by the outlines of the Leitrim and Sligo hills, a row of rounded peaks against the blue, growing paler and more translucent in the southern distance.

Under the sun, there is a white glinting of lakes away across the plain, where brown and purple are blended with

green in broad spaces of mingling color. To the west the ground rises again into hills crowded behind each other, sombre masses, for ages called the Mountains of Storms. Far beyond them, vague as blue cloud-wreaths in the blue, are the hills that guard our western ocean. From their sunset-verges the land draws near again, in the long range of the Mayo cliffs,--fierce walls of rock that bar the fiercer ocean from a wild world of storm-swept uplands. The cliffs gradually lessen, and their colors grow clearer, till they sink at last toward the sand-banks of Ballysadare, divided from us only by a channel of shallow sea.

The whole colored circle of sea and land, of moor and mountain, is full of the silence of intense and mighty power. The ocean is tremulous with the breath of life. The mountains, in their stately beauty, rise like immortals in the clear azure. The signs of our present works are dwarfed to insignificance.

Everywhere within that wide world of hill and plain, and hardly less ancient than the hills themselves, are strewn memorials of another world that has vanished, sole survivors of a long-hidden past. A wordless history is written there, in giant circles of stone and cromlechs of piled blocks, so old that in a land of most venerable tradition their very legend has vanished away.

Close under us lies Carrowmore, with its labyrinth of cromlechs and stone circles, a very city of dead years. There is something awe-inspiring in the mere massiveness of these piled and ordered stones, the visible boundaries of invisible thoughts; that awe is deepened by the feeling of the tremendous power lavished in bringing them here,

setting them up in their ordered groups, and piling the crowns of the cromlechs on other only less gigantic stones; awe gives place to overwhelming mystery when we can find no kinship to our own thoughts and aims in their stately grouping. We are in presence of archaic purposes recorded in a massive labyrinth, purposes darkly hidden from us in the unknown.

There are circles of huge boulders ranged at equal distances, firmly set upright in the earth. They loom vast, like beads of a giant necklace on the velvet grass. There are cromlechs set alone--a single huge boulder borne aloft in the air on three others of hardly less weight. There are cromlechs set in the midst of titanic circles of stone, with lesser boulders guarding the cromlechs closer at hand. There are circles beside circles rising in their grayness, with the grass and heather carpeting their aisles. There they rest in silence, with the mountain as their companion, and, beyond the mountain, the ever-murmuring sea.

Thus they have kept their watch through long dark ages. When sunrise reddens them, their shadows stretch westward in bars of darkness over the burnished grass. From morning to midday the shadows shrink, ever hiding from the sun; an army of wraiths, sprite-like able to grow gigantic or draw together into mere blots of darkness. When day declines, the shadows come forth again, joining ghostly hands from stone to stone, from circle to circle, under the sunset sky, and merging at last into the universal realm of night. Thus they weave their web, inexorable as tireless Time.

There are more than threescore of these circles at Carrowmore, under Knocknarea. Yet Carrowmore is only one among many memorials of dead years within our horizon. At Abbey-quarter, within the town-limits of Sligo itself, there is another great ring of boulders, the past and the present mingling together. On the northern coast, across the Bay of Sligo, where the headland of Streedagh juts forth into the sea, there is another giant necklace of gray blocks ranged upon the moor. Farther along the shore, where Bundoran marks the boundary of Donegal, a cromlech and a stone circle rise among the sand-banks. All have the same rugged and enduring massiveness, all are wrapped in the same mystery.

Eastward from Sligo, Lough Gill lies like a mirror framed in hills, wreathed with dark green woods. On a hill-top north of the lake, in the Deer-park, is a monument of quite other character--a great oblong marked by pillared stones, like an open temple. At three points huge stones are laid across from pillar to pillar. The whole enclosure was doubtless so barred in days of old, a temple of open arches crowning the summit of the hill. The great ruin by the lake keeps its secret well.

Another ring of giant stones rests on a hillside across the lake, under the Cairn hill, with its pyramid crown. All these are within easy view from our first vantage-point on Knocknarea, yet they are but the outposts of an army which spreads everywhere throughout the land. They are as common in wild and inaccessible places as on the open plain. Some rise in lonely islands off the coast; others on the summits of mountains; yet others in the midst of tilled

fields. They bear no relation at all to the land as it is to-day. The very dispersion of these great stone monuments, scattered equally among places familiar or wild, speaks of a remote past--a past when all places were alike wild, or all alike familiar.

Where the gale-swept moors of Achill Island rise up toward the slope of Slievemore Mountain, there are stone circles and cromlechs like the circles of Carrowmore. The wild storms of the Atlantic rush past them, and the breakers roar under their cliffs. The moorland round the towering mountain is stained with ochre and iron under a carpet of heather rough as the ocean winds.

Away to the south from Slievemore the horizon is broken by an army of mountains, beginning with the Twelve Peaks of Connemara. Eastward of these hills are spread the great Galway lakes; eastward of these a wide expanse of plain. This is the famous Moytura of traditional history, whose story we shall presently tell. Ages ago a decisive battle was fought there; but ages before the battle, if we are not greatly misled, the stone circles of the plain were already there. Tradition says that these circles numbered seven in the beginning, but only two remain unbroken.

Between Galway Bay and the wide estuary of the Shannon spread the moorlands of Clare, bleak under Atlantic gales, with never a tree for miles inward from the sea. Like a watch-tower above the moorlands stand. Slieve Callan, the crown of the mountain abruptly shorn. Under the shoulder of the great hill, with the rolling moorlands all about it, stands a solitary cromlech; formed of huge flat stones, it was at first a roomy chamber shut in on all four

sides, and roofed by a single enormous block; the ends have fallen, so that it is now an open tunnel formed of three huge stones.

The coast runs southward from the Shannon to the strand of Tralee, the frontier of the southern mountain world, where four ranges of red sandstone thrust themselves forth towards the ocean, with long fiords running inland between them. On a summit of the first of these red ranges, Caherconree above Tralee strand, there is a stone circle, massive, gigantic, dwelling in utter solitude.

We have recorded a few only out of many of these great stone monuments strewn along our Atlantic coast, whether on moor or cliff or remote mountain-top.

There are others as notable everywhere in the central plain, the limestone world of lakes and rivers. On a green hill-crest overlooking the network of inlets of Upper Erne there is a circle greater than any we have recorded. The stones are very massive, some of them twice the height of a tall man. To one who stands within the ring these huge blocks of stone shut out the world; they loom large against the sky, full of unspoken secrets like the Sphinx. Within this mighty ring the circle of Stonehenge might be set, leaving a broad road all round it on the grass.

From Fermanagh, where this huge circle is, we gain our best clue to the age of all these monuments, everywhere so much like each other in their massive form and dimensions, everywhere so like in their utter mystery. Round the lakes of Erne there are wide expanses of peat, dug as fuel for centuries, and in many places as much as twelve feet deep, on a bed of clay, the waste of old glaciers. Though formed

with incredible slowness, this whole mass of peat has grown since some of the great stone monuments were built; if we can tell the time thus taken for its growth we know at least the nearer limit of the time that divides us from their builders.

Like a tree, the peat has its time of growth and its time of rest. Spring covers it with green, winter sees it brown and dead. Thus thin layers are spread over it, a layer for a year, and it steadily gains in thickness with the passing of the years. The deeper levels are buried and pressed down, slowly growing firm and rigid, but still keeping the marks of the layers that make them up. It is like a dry ocean gradually submerging the land. Gathering round the great stone circles as they stand on the clay, this black sea has risen slowly but surely, till at last it has covered them with its dark waves, and they rest in the quiet depths, with a green foam of spring freshness far above their heads.

At Killee and Breagho, near Enniskillen, the peat has once more been cut away, restoring some of these great stones to the light. If we count the layers and measure the thickness of the peat, we can tell how many years are represented by its growth. We can, therefore, tell that the great stone circle, which the first growth of peat found already there, must be at least as old, and may be indefinitely older. By careful count it is found that one foot of black peat is made up of eight hundred layers; eight hundred summers and eight hundred winters went to the building of it. One foot of black peat, therefore, will measure the time from before the founding of Rome or the First Olympiad to the beginning of our era. Another foot will bring

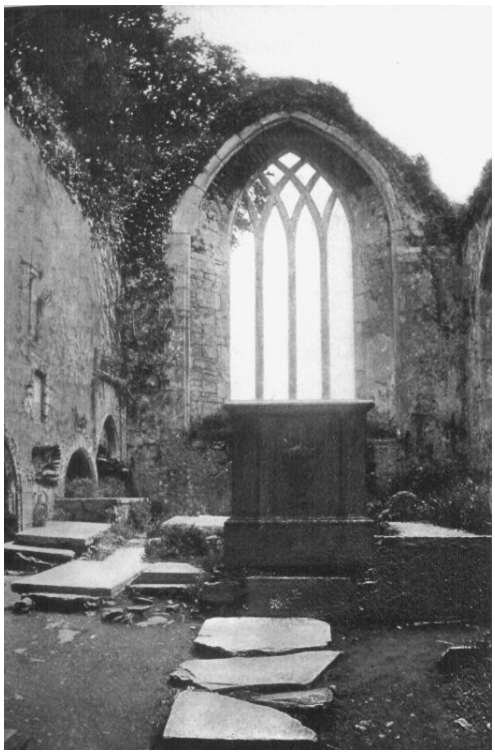
us to the crowning of Charlemagne. Yet another, to the death of Shakespeare and Cervantes. Since then, only a few inches have been added. Here is a chronometer worthy of our great cromlechs and stone circles.

Some of these, as we saw, rest on the clay, with a sea of peat twelve feet deep around and above them. Every foot of the peat stands for eight centuries. Since the peat began to form, eight or ten thousand years have passed, and when that vast period began, the great monuments of stone were already there. How long they had stood in their silence before our chronometer began to run we cannot even guess.

At Cavancarragh, on the shoulder of Toppid Mountain, some four miles from Enniskillen, there is one of these circles; a ring of huge stone boulders with equal spaces between stone and stone. A four-fold avenue of great blocks stretches away from it along the shoulder of the hill, ending quite abruptly at the edge of a ravine, the steep channel of a torrent. It looks as if the river, gradually undermining the hillside, had cut the avenue in halves, so that the ravine seems later in date than the stones. But that we cannot be quite sure of. This, however, we do certainly know: that since the avenue of boulders and the circle of huge red stones were ranged in order, a covering of peat in some parts twelve feet thick has grown around and above them, hiding them at last altogether from the day. In places the peat has been cut away again, leaving the stones once more open to the light, standing, as they always stood, on the surface of the clay.

Here again we get the same measurement. At eight hundred annual layers to the foot, and with twelve feet of peat, we have nine thousand six hundred years,--not for the age of the stone circles, but for that part of their age which we are able to measure. For we know not how long they were there before the peat began to grow. It may have been a few years; it may have been a period as great or even greater than the ten thousand years we are able to measure.

The peat gradually displaced an early forest of giant oaks. Their stems are still there, standing rooted in the older clay. Where they once stood no trees now grow. The whole face of the land has changed. Some great change of climate must lie behind this vanishing of vast forests, this gradual growth of peat-covered moors. A dry climate must have changed to one much damper; heat must have changed to cold, warm winds to chilly storms. In the southern promontories, among red sandstone hills, still linger survivors of that more genial clime--groves of arbutus that speak of Greece or Sicily; ferns, as at Killarney, found elsewhere only in the south, in Portugal, or the Canary Islands.



MUCKROSS ABBEY, KILLARNEY.

On the southwestern horizon from Toppid Mountain, when the sky is clear after rain, you can trace the outline of the Curlew hills, our southern limit of view from Knocknarea. Up to the foot of the hills spreads a level country of pastures dappled with lakes, broken into a thousand fantastic inlets by the wasting of the limestone rock. The daisies are the stars in that green sky. Just beyond the young stream of the Shannon, where it links Lough Garra to Lough Key, there is a lonely cromlech, whose tremendous crown was once upheld by five massive pillars. There is a kindred wildness and mystery in the cromlech and the lonely hills.

Southward again of this, where the town of Lough Rea takes its name from the Gray Lake, stands a high hill crowned by a cromlech, with an encircling earthwork. It marks a green ring of sacred ground alone upon the hill-top, shut off from all the world, and with the mysterious