

Curragh History Archives



THE WREN OF THE CURRAGH.

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INTRODUCTION.

NOT out of idleness, or for the gratification of mere curiosity, or for the pleasure of making a drawing-room sensation by an adventure with something strange and wild about it, was the task undertaken which resulted in the story of the Curragh bush-women. It was done simply in accordance with the routine of action necessary nowadays for the redress of grievances, and for the working of our administrative system. For it must have been generally observed that a new principle governs the performance of official duties in England. Elsewhere, when certain men are appointed to take part in the government of a country, they understand that they are to do the duties of their office forthwith. With us the understanding is quite different : no work is to be begun except under such emphatic demand as in private life would answer to the practice of regularly kicking your footman to the coal scuttle when the fire needs replenishing. No doubt it will be said that this is an evil consequence of government by public opinion ; but whatever the steps by which the result has been attained, we have now got so far in no government that those whose duty it is to check or to heal the disorders of our social system are indifferent and supine to a degree which has destroyed all hope of them. Confidence in public servants died long ago. It has come to be an understood and accepted thing that it is for them to conceal the manifold small evils which prey upon the country ; that it is for the public to discover them ; and that not even after discovery are they, the officers of the nation, bound to find means of remedy, unless it is demanded with considerable outcry. No doubt it is a very grotesque state of things, and one that is not paralleled in any other conditions of human circumstance ; but it exists, and we must accommodate ourselves to its existence. It was in accordance with this new exigency of political life that, years ago, some gentlemen who wrote in the Lancet took upon themselves the duty of other gentlemen paid to inspect the

Curragh History Archives

hospital wards of workhouses-who, in accordance with their traditions, saw and said nothing, or, seeing nothing, had nothing to say. Through the labours of the volunteer inspectors the most cruel practices, the most terrible sufferings were revealed again and again. But there was no outcry ; popular feeling was shocked, but silent ; and therefore the Poor Law Board did nothing to remedy what would not have been permitted for an hour had its president and secretaries been in the public service as well as in the public pay. It was not till what in official places is called a “row” was caused by workhouse revelations of a more curious and picturesque character, though really indicating less cruelty and guilt, that those who had the guardianship of our disabled poor began to think of putting an end to the infamous creation of their own neglect. But (and this is almost comically characteristic, though it is intolerable too), as the “sensation” referred to the London workhouses alone, only the horrors of the London workhouses were to be abolished. An equally shocking state of things existing and known to exist by our officials in provincial poorhouses was allowed to await the future investigations of the press and another outcry from the public.

In these circumstances, it was thought worth while to open the eyes of our authorities upon another scandal, to which they had been deliberately shut. Deliberately, we say, because not only all that has been told in these pages, but infinitely more, was known to the Government years ago. They had not to wait to be informed of what was going on, or of the shameful and hideously wasteful consequences that flowed from it ; they had only to be told that it might be as well to seek some remedy. They knew long ago that the poor wretches congregated on the Curragh, in ditches and bush dwellings no better than those which are so distressingly savage when inhabited by Kaffirs, lay out there winter and summer, utterly neglected ; and they continued that neglect although they knew, by statistics carefully prepared, and as carefully hidden away in official pigeon-holes, that the consequences of their indifference told not only upon the poor wretches themselves (and of course nobody is bound to pity them), but also in swelling the immorality of the camp and filling the hospitals with diseased and disabled soldiers. For this is not only a matter of mere humanity-that answer, though it has sometimes proved very acceptable, will not apply in the present case. Our readers must have understood, though for obvious reasons we left it for inference, that our solicitude does not by any means extend to those miserable bush-women alone. We have to deal with something more than the scandal and disgrace of permitting the existence of such a colony as we have described. To tolerate it is to foster the spread of disease more degrading and more direful than any other that can be named ; it is to favour a state of things inhuman in itself, destructive of public decency, destructive of public health, and as a mere matter of money expenditure costly and extravagant to a monstrous degree. It may be conceded that it is nobody's business to take vicious women under official protection-nobody's business to palliate the misery vice brings upon them but it is somebody's business to put an end to a state of things which contributes to the hospital of the Curragh thirty-eight per cent. of its patients-of every hundred there thirty-eight recipients and disseminators of one most shocking and contagious disease. That is the latest report ; the latest, but not the worst of a long succession of reports, made in full knowledge of how they came to be so particularly bad. The gentlemen whose business it is to govern such matters

Curragh History Archives

have known the average rise to fifty per cent., without counting patients whose sickness was not immediately though certainly due to the same cause ; and they were aware at the same time that the cause was to be found amongst outcast wretches lying in unutterable misery in Kildare infirmary, in Naas workhouse, and under the whin and furze of the Curragh. They knew that no such precaution as is elsewhere taken, in the establishment of special hospitals or hospital wards, had been thought of ; and, what is more, they knew why fifty or sixty women preferred to live even through the hardest winter in ditches and bushes on the common, rather than seek shelter in the workhouse. This is a part of the subject which has probably given the public some consideration. They have said, "Surely it cannot be from destitution alone that these women choose to live as they do live, not only in summer, but through all the inclemencies of winter. There is a workhouse open for them ; they would go there if they were not utterly abandoned to vice and in love with it." And no doubt this consideration has turned many a mind from further care about the matter so far as the women are concerned. But let us correct that view of the case by a picture taken not just lately, but in the depths of a recent winter. At that time, when the ground was covered with snow, fifty women lay out upon the common, and fifty (their numbers differed by only two or three) were in Naas workhouse. What the condition of the wilder ones must have been is not a matter that need be enlarged upon ; the circumstances are, a vast bleak common, winter days and nights, snow and bitter winds, constant hunger, and the shelter of a bush. But before we make up our minds that nothing but the sheer infatuation of vice could have kept them in that condition while the doors of a poor-house were open to receive them, let us see how the others fared. The work-house itself was half empty ; but these women were not allowed to enter it and share such poor comforts as it might easily have given them. The whole fifty, with four children, were turned into a range of low hovels separated from the main building by a high wall, and so ruinous as to be totally unfit for human habitation : and this was in winter. The beds were bags of foul straw, and two or three women slept on each of them-huddled, sick and sound together, without any attempt at separation : and more than one-fourth of them were not sound. The measurement of one of these hovels was as follows : length, 28 feet ; breadth, 14 feet ; height, 9 feet. Imagine a room, a broken hovel, of these dimensions ; imagine twelve such beds in it as we have described ; imagine those twelve beds occupied by twenty-three women and two children ; and ask whether you also would not rather have lain out on the common. That is a faithful picture ; nor need anything be added to it, except that these despised and certainly very wicked women were not even allowed to worship with the other paupers ; they had to thank God by themselves, and listen to the exhortations of his minister in their own hovels apart. This, we say, is a faithful picture taken not long ago. What has been done to improve that state of things ? Anything ? If not, ought not something to be done-say, to keep down hospital expenses ? Or are our rulers at the War Office waiting for the popular outcry as usual ?

Curragh History Archives

THE WREN OF THE CURRAGH.

Part I

For many a year mysterious little stories have been wafted to England from the Curragh-hints and glimpses of a certain colony of poor wretches there who lived as nobody else in the three kingdoms lived, and died most like people who do come within the bills of mortality-tramps and others-when they happened to perish of cold, want, and whisky, upon that vast common. In these stories there was always something so shocking that comfortable people were glad to disbelieve them, and something so strange that it was reasonable enough to set them aside : they were not probable in an orderly, commonplace, police-regulated, Christian community like our own. Besides, one could not read those little stories-paragraphs in odd corners of newspapers in the great gooseberry season-without a knowing suspicion that if only half they told was true more must have been heard of them. This seemed all the more likely because the Curragh is not an unfrequented nook in some distant corner of the land, but a plain near a capital city-an encampment wherein thousands of Englishmen as well as thousands of Irishmen constantly live, gentle and simple both, and where scores of strangers, visitors who go there for no other purpose but to see what is to be seen, peer about every week of every summer season. It did not seem at all natural that things so very unlike what ought to happen in the nineteenth century as those little wandering paragraphs hinted at could go on from year to year without investigation and arrest. But our own observation is that the wildest circumstances and most incredible anomalies of life are those which lie open to every eye, and are stared at, and are not seen. And therefore when, a few weeks ago, other little paragraphs came wafted from the Curragh-chiefly to the effect that the poor wretches of whom we have spoken are called "wrens," "because they live in holes in the banks," and that things are not so bad as they used to be some years ago, when it was not uncommon to find a wren (or unfortunate woman) lying dead amongst the furze of a morning, we thought it worth while to ask a hardy man of brains to go and look into the matter. Hardy, we say, because it seemed to us now, as on a former occasion which need not specify, that to ask for accurate live knowledge from official persons would be answered by the gift of a stone, as it always is. Therefore we solicited some one to go to the camp, and find the wrens (if any), and visit their nests (if any), and spend time enough by day and night amongst them to let us know what peculiar people it is of which so many incredible hints have been given-and forgotten. What the nature of the task really was, and what additional knowledge it gives us of the world we live in, will appear from the following narrative :

It was on an evening before September had cooled-three weeks ago and more-that I set out to investigate the manners and customs, the habits and habitat, of a bird not unknown indeed in England, nor even in London, but reported to be on the Curragh of a seriously peculiar kind. Rumour had told us all we had heard of the species ; Rumour is of ticklish veracity ; but one thing may be said for her, that if she sometimes tells more lies than is tolerable, she sometimes tells more truth than it is convenient to believe. "Before September

Curragh History Archives

had cooled" is not merely an ornamental phrase. It is meant to be remembered as a statement of fact ; because what aspect the place of my visit would have now, what it would wear when the turf of the Curragh, so soft to the foot, is even more silent to the ear under a winter day's snow, has got to be considered as we go on. It is an important part of the lesson learned there on an autumn day, sharp enough, but very tolerable.

From London to Holyhead, from Holyhead to Kingstown, from Kingstown to Dublin-all this was within the limits of civilization. Not that I think it a matter for congratulation that anybody in the nineteenth century should be seasick. Nor that I wish the dispensation altered. The pleasantest spectacle I have witnessed for some time was a director of a railway company (who annihilated space) and a secretary of a telegraph company (who abolished time, and used heaven's lightning as a messenger) alternate with a basin on a playful sea. Dublin-yes, Dublin is a civilized city too : there is not courage enough in the world to deny it. But Kildare, county town though it be, one may be permitted to withhold from it the all-sufficing designation. To Kildare my steps were directed, for that town is nearer than any other to the Curragh camp : - thence could I most easily go a-nesting.

From Dublin to Kildare, past much squalor that seemed less to lie upon the earth, in the shape of wretched huts of poverty and idleness, than to be born out it naturally, as toadstools are. At Kildare station carmen were rampant-great industry of tongue among them, and much ingenuity of speech. "Bedad, sir," said one of them, with a snatch at my luggage, "I'm the man to match ye ! Ye're in luck to-day, sir, indade. The mare I'm driving is the celebrated Scottish Queen-no less ! own sister to Achaivement, and the best blood in Ireland. And where'll I be driving yer hanner ? Impayrial Hotel ? I'll make no mistake, sir, seein' there's no other but one, and that's a clubhouse." And so I go to the Imperial Hotel, where the guest proposes, the host disposes. "Foive, did ye say ? It's no dinner ye'll be gettin' at foive, sir, nor no baife aither ; it's mutton ye'll have." And you have mutton at four. At least I did, or at any other hour when the table-cloth happened to be disengaged. But then, how do I know ? More honourable guests than myself may have been there, and it was necessary for me to look rough and sink all fastidiousness, because my business was with people with whom a gentleman is never seen, and can never mingle with a hope of learning anything : at least, so I thought then, though I have reason to believe now that a gentleman and an officer may sometimes send for a wren and nourish her in his honourable bosom.

In the afternoon, Jimmy Lynch-my carman on many little expeditions afterwards-a loud, loquacious carman, whose adoration was given to horses and his respect to Mr. Donnelly, who fought the great fight with Cooper in Donnelly's Hollow-called to take me on my first visit to the Curragh. As we drove along, Jimmy talked of his mare-there was never such a mare ; of the fight-there was never such a fight ; while I, half listening, looked away to the vast common where an army lives all the year round. "How many men do you think, Jimmy ?" I asked, breaking into his raptures about the "Scottish Queen." "Well, thin, tin or twelve thousand, maybe ! and a mighty fine time they have of it !" "Without their wives and sweethearts ?" "Widout their wives, shure, and hwat of that, yer hanner ? But some of their wives is with them, I believe, good luck to them ! though there's no sweethearts in the camp at all-divil a one ! But over there," pointing vaguely with his whip across the common, "there's

Curragh History Archives

many of them poor devils living in places made of furze inthirely. Winther and summer in a bit of a bush." "Wrens don't you call them ?" "Wrins ! That's the name ov 'em ! Wrins !-that's what they do call 'em, and a dridful life they lade. Most distrissing, believe me !" This exclamation was not priggish in Jimmy-it was only a note caught from the mouths of other intelligent tourists. A moment of silence and his mind sought relief in the virtues of his mare, while my eyes wandered over the common where many a furze bush was visible, but none which looked as if it could be inhabited by any creatures but birds of the air and beasts of the field.

On the Curragh the air is strong ; an easterly wind was blowing over its miles of waste land-dead level for the most part, but with undulations here and there, and broken by mounds and raths, stretching along for a considerable distance and at a height at least distinguishable. The turf is soft and elastic everywhere. Sheep browse upon it ; and there you may see the Irish shepherd, idler than nobody else in his green isle, and the Irish shepherdess (O Arcadia !) flustering her rags out of their natural repose in an attempt to separate the sheep marked this way from the sheep marked that. That she might have been a beauty you see well, because her head, with its abundant locks, is bare, and so are her well-shapen legs ; but she isn't-the chance was lost long ago. The Scottish Queen bowls along. There are good roads from Kildare to the camp, and from time to time we meet cars upon them containing well-buttoned military men. Other military men are seen, in ones and twos and threes, lounging in one direction : they show in moving patches of red amongst the dark-green masses of furze.

Jimmy has no precise instructions ; he is to drive upon the Curragh, and that's all ; but he has a notion that generally we want to go to the camp, and particularly to the Hollow, the actual spot where Cooper was licked by the immortal Donnelly. In this somewhat aimless way we came to a series of block huts, extending for two miles, perhaps, on either side of the road. Here and there a few groups of soldiers were seen lounging listlessly, or engaged in some athletic sport. Jimmy pointed out each object of interest as we drove along. "And that's the Catholic chapel, your hanner. And that's the Prodestan' church. And this is Donnelly's Hollow" (strewed with many canvas tents) "where the fight was ! Hould the mare, sir ! hould Scottish Queen, and, bedad ! I'll show ye where Cooper stood, and where Donnelly stood-well I know the futmarks ov 'em !" Nor would Jimmy be denied. Fortunately, the Scottish Queen restrained the fiery impulses of her blood, and stood like any cart-horse still while Jimmy planted himself in Donnelly's footmarks, and tried to satisfy the last object of my journey by putting himself in a fighting attitude on that heroic spot. With as little shock to his feelings as I could contrive I made him aware that I didn't care extremely about Cooper or Donnelly ; that the afternoon was too far advanced for a regular visit to the camp itself, but that in driving back I should like to get a glimpse of the wren's nests. Jimmy put his hands down slowly, and in silence remounted the car. The sojers he could understand as the object of a tourist's gaze, and Donnelly's Hollow as an object of his contemplations ; but "thim wrins !"

However, back we went through the line of huts ; the road dwindled, and we were presently driving over the common itself. By this time the air was fast growing colder and mistier. The block huts of the camp, seen only in dim outline, soon were the only hints of human life in the dreary prospect. As far

Curragh History Archives

as the eye could distinguish within the waning limits of the light all was barren and cheerless. The sky above looked waste as the heath itself, and drearier ; for there were still those constantly recurring patches of furze to break the green monotony below, while there was nothing at all to break the grey monotony above. How in such solitary places at such times the mind also seems to close in from above and on all sides in a twilight sort of way, everybody knows. Mine soon got into that condition as we rolled over the noiseless turf ; so that it was with a start I presently saw a bare-headed, bare-footed woman standing only a few feet distant. Had the figure sprang out of the earth or dropped from the clouds my surprise could not have been greater ; true though it was that I had come to Ireland to see this very woman-her and her companions. At the same moment, "There's wrin, sir !" Jimmy shouted, "and there's a nest ! and there's another !" I saw no nest. The clumps of furze looked a little thicker than usual in the direction indicated, but there was nothing more remarkable about them. But when, jumping from the car, I walked a few paces onward, I understood better what nesting on the Curragh is. These heaps of furze are built and furnished for human occupation ; and here and there outside them were squatted groups of those who dwelt therein-"winther and summer in a bit of a bush." Not one or two, but several groups-half naked, flagrant-indicating a considerable colony. I spent a long night amongst them afterwards, and believe I know pretty well all that is worth knowing of a tribe of outcasts as interesting, perhaps, as any which the scientific men of the Abyssinian expedition are likely to write books about. One thing I may as well add here. When your correspondent who inspected the casual wards of Lambeth told what he had seen there, he thought it necessary to warn your readers that there was not a single word of it that could justly be called exaggerated. So I assure them that what I may have to say of the Curragh shall not have a touch of false "colour" anywhere. But of course, in dealing with such a matter a great deal must be suppressed.

Part II.

WHEN once a wren's nest is distinguished from the natural mounds of furze amidst which it is placed, after-recognition is tolerably easy ; though at a first glance it is so much like a mere bush that you might well pass by without dreaming that it was the habitation of human creatures. However, there are differences, of course ; and thus after I had looked for a few moments at my first nest, and glanced around and beyond it, I saw that I was in fact in the midst of a little village, with as many-homes shall I say ? and as many inhabitants as some English hamlets whose names are well marked on the map. Dotted about to right, and left, and onward, at intervals varying from 20 to 100 yards, were other bushes, which bore not only certain signs of man's constructive skill, but of woman's occupancy. Suspended against the prickly sides of one of them was a petticoat, against another a crinoline ; an article so bulky and intractable that it could not well be got inside. Indeed, the probability is that it never did get inside at all-never was inside ; but was put on and taken off, as occasion required, at the hole that served for a door. How could three or four large-limbed women, crinolined accordingly, live in a space no bigger than the ox's crib or the horse's stall ? Besides, that is exaggeration. To be

Curragh History Archives

particular, the nests have an interior space of about nine feet long by seven feet broad ; and the roof is not more than four and a-half feet from the ground. You crouch into them, as beasts crouch into cover ; and there is no standing upright till you crawl out again. They are rough, misshapen domes of furze-like big, rude birds' nests compacted of harsh branches, and turned topsy-turvy upon the ground. The walls are some twenty inches thick, and they do get pretty well compacted-much more than would be imagined. There is no chimney-not even a hole in the roof, which generally slopes forward. The smoke of the turf fire which burns on the floor of the hut has to pass out at the door when the wind is favourable, and to reek slowly through the crannied walls when it is not. The door is a narrow opening nearly the height of the structure-a slit in it, kept open by two rude posts, which also serve to support the roof. To keep it down, and secure from the winds that drive over the Curragh so furiously, sods of earth are placed on top, here and there, with a piece of corrugated iron (much used in the camp, apparently-I saw many old and waste pieces lying about) as an additional protection from rain. Sometimes a piece of this iron is placed in the longitudinal slit aforesaid ; and then you have a door as well as a doorway. Flooring there is none of any kind whatever, nor any attempt to make the den snugger by burrowing down into the bosom of the earth. The process of construction seems to be to clear the turf from the surface of the plain to the required space, to cut down some bushes for building material, and to call in a friendly soldier or two to rear the walls by the simple process of piling and trampling. When the nest is newly made, as that one was which I first examined, and if you happen to view it on a hot day, no doubt it seems tolerably snug shelter. A sportsman might lie there for a summer night or two without detriment to his health or his moral nature. But all the nests are not newly made ; and if the sun shines on the Curragh, bitter winds drive across it, with swamping rains for days and weeks together ; and miles of snow-covered plain sometimes lie between this wretched colony of abandoned women and the nearest town. Wind and rain are their worst enemies (unless we reckon in mankind), and play "old gooseberry" with the bush dwellings. The beating of the one and the pelting of the other soon destroy their bowery summer aspect. They get crazy ; they fall toward this side and that ; they shrink in and down upon the outcast wretches that huddle in them ; and the doorposts don't keep the roof up and the clods don't keep it down :-the nest is nothing but a furzy hole, such as, for comfort, any wild beast may match anywhere ; leaving cleanliness out of the question. Of course, I did not make all these observations at a first visit. It was afterwards that I found No. 5 Bush (they are called No. 1 Bush, No. 2 Bush, and so forth by the wrens themselves) was a really superior edifice in its way-larger, better than any other ; and well it should be, for it was the abode of five or six women. Other nests were smaller, and fast going to decay ; but even in the smallest three women were harboured, while one was tenanted by as many as eight. Altogether, there are ten bushes, with about sixty inhabitants. In them they sleep, cook, eat, drink, receive visits, and perform all the various offices of life. If they are sick, there they lie. Brothers and mothers and fathers go to see them there. There sometimes-such occurrences do happen-they lie in child-bed ; and there sometimes they die. My eyes had not taken in one-tenth of what is above described, when they were brought to bear upon the group of women which had first arrested my

Curragh History Archives

attention. They were three members of the family of No. 5 Bush. One was a perfectly neat-looking girl, washed, combed, and arrayed in a clean starched cotton gown, and with bright white stockings and well-fitting boots ; she had evidently just completed the one toilette of the day. Two others squatted at the bush door, and they were foul as any Hottentots. One filthy frieze petticoat worn about the loins, another thrown loosely over their backs-that was all their clothing. Their towzled hair hung down upon their naked shoulders, and straggled upon their unwashed faces, as they sat in a full stream of gossip. All three were fine limbed women, large and sturdy ; as, indeed, are many of the inhabitants of this Arcadian village. Now and then I came across some fragile creature, her strength broken ; but these were the exceptions rather than the rule, certainly. And several of them were not only fine-looking, but well-mannered girls-when sober ; and I had an opportunity of seeing a letter written by one in as pretty and "ladylike" a hand as if it had been traced at a davenport in Belgrave-square, instead of on the bottom of a tin pot on the Curragh.

"Good day to you, sir, and will you walk into our little house ?" This greeting was addressed to me by the woman in the clean cotton gown, and that in a voice and with a manner that had nothing in them but simple civility. At the same moment her companions rose up, and one of them attacked my carman, Jimmy Lynch, with language that was absolutely appalling. Now my courage was first put to the test, no less by the civil invitation than by the astounding outburst of this black-haired young virago. To walk into the little house was what I had come for ; and there was the invitation to make myself acquainted with a Curragh interior, and the domestic economy of the wren. It was not with any alacrity, however, that I bowed my head and crept into the bush-leaving Jimmy to bear with the monstrous blasphemies, the raving obscenities, of the girl of eighteen outside.

It was washing day at No. 5 Bush-with one of its tenants, at least ; and she appeared to be engaged upon all her clothes at once (excepting only a single frieze petticoat which she did wear)-in a tin saucepan. Another young woman idly squatted near the doorway, was bidden to get up "and give the gintleman a sate ;" when it appeared that she was sitting on another saucepan, bottom upward. This vessel was perforated all over, at the sides and at the bottom alike ; the only explanation of which seemed to me at the time to be that this was an Irish device for letting the fire get more readily at the water ; however, I learned the real use of a perforated saucepan afterwards. With apologies to Miss Clancy, I accepted the "sate" she proffered, and disposing myself upon it with more or less of grace, looked about me to discover the appointments of a wren's nest.

Little observation was needed to make the inventory complete. The most important piece of furniture was a wooden shelf running along the back of the nest, and propped on sticks driven into the earthen floor. Some mugs ; some plates ; some cups and saucers ; a candlestick ; two or three old knives and forks, battered and rusty ; a few dull and dented sthingys ; a teapot (this being a rather rich establishment), and several other articles of a like character, were displayed upon the shelf ; and a grateful sight it was. I declare I was most thankful for the cups and saucers ; and as for the teapot, it looked like an ark of redemption in crockery ware. If they were not, as I told myself when my eyes first rested on them, the only human-looking things in the place, they

Curragh History Archives

did give one a comfortable feeling of assurance that these wretched and desperate outcasts had not absolutely broken with the common forms and habits of civilized life. And that this feeling was not a strained or singular one I learned afterwards in conversation with a soldier. This gentleman averred to me on oath, with the air of a man who is going to startle you out of all false and maudlin sympathies, that wrens used cups and saucers "just like other people."

There was little furniture in the nest beside the shelf and its decorations. Beneath it was heaped an armful of musty straw, originally smuggled in from the camp stables ; this, drawn out and shaken upon the earth, was the common bed. A rough wooden box, such as candles are packed in, stood in a corner ; one or two saucepans, and a horrid old tea-kettle, which had all the look of a beldame punished by drink, were disposed in various nooks in the furzy walls ; a frying-pan was stuck into them by the handle, in company with a crooked stick of iron, used as a poker ; and-undoubtedly that was there –a cheap little looking-glass was stuck near the roof. These things formed the whole furniture and appointments of the nest, if we exclude a petticoat or so hung up at intervals. There was not a stool in the place, and as for anything in the shape of a table, there was not room even for the idea of such a thing. Except for the cups and saucers, I doubt whether any Australian native habitation is more savage or more destitute ; he can get an old saucepan or two, and knows how to spread a little straw on the ground. Nor were any of the other nests (and I believe I looked into them all) better or differently furnished. The only difference was in the quantity of crockery. In every one the candle box was to be found. I discovered that it was the common receptacle of those little personal ornaments and cherished trifles which women in every grade of life hoard with a sort of animal instinct. In every one an upturned saucepan was used for a seat when squatting on the earth became too tiresome. In all the practice is to sleep with your head under the shelf (thus gaining some additional protection from the wind) and your feet to the turf fire, which is kept burning all night near the doorway. Here the use of the perforated saucepan becomes apparent. It is placed over the burning turf when the wrens dispose themselves to rest ; and, as there is no want of air in these dwellings, the turf burns well and brightly under the protecting pot. Another remembrance of a decent life is seen in the fact that the women always undress themselves to sleep upon their handful of straw, their day clothes serving to cover them.

While I was making the particular observations which were afterwards expanded into the above-described generalities, I was not allowed to remain silent, of course. However, by dint of a little management I contrived to confine the conversation to tobacco and whisky, my pouch and flask (well filled in expectation of a call upon them) furnishing the primary subjects of discourse. Both topics were handled with such freedom and dexterity that in less than fifteen minutes they were fairly exhausted. I thereupon proposed to take leave, and was not opposed by anything like the cajolery or the solicitation for money that I expected to encounter. The women were quite sober, and therefore well-behaved : which I found to be a common characteristic. I verily do believe that the whole world contains no spectacle of degraded humanity so complete as those unfortunate women present when they come home in roaring groups from their hunting grounds, drunk. Their

Curragh History Archives

flushed faces, their embruted eyes, their wildly flowing hair, their reckless gestures, and, above all, their strong voices competing in the use of the most hideous language depravity ever invented, make such a scene as I believe can be matched nowhere under the sun. But the same women who in such circumstances seemed to be possessed with a determination never to be outdone in violence, or blasphemy, or obscenity, are, when sober, of civil conversation and decent demeanour. This is true not of one or two, but of many of them. So I had no more difficulty in getting out of No. 5 Bush than if I had been making a morning call at home. The person who was washing her clothes in the saucepan bade me good day with an expression of her assurance that I had a good heart, while Miss Clancy simply hoped I would keep my promise to come again when they were less occupied with domestic cares. When I got outside I found that Jimmy Lynch had been less fortunate than the Saxon stranger whom he had conducted to the strange place. He was still engaged in wordy conflict, and was so completely beaten that he retreated upon the car upon my first appearance, and started off before I was fairly settled on it. "Did any one iver hear the like ov them devils ?" he roared. "It's disghusting intirely !"

But ready as Jimmy was to "call" upon the energies of Scottish Queen, I insisted upon his going slowly through the bush village, and then I was enabled to see on a first visit that its inhabitants at any rate were all of one kind and looked all alike. In the first place every woman is Irish. There is not a single Englishwoman now in the nest, though there were two of our countrywomen there lately : these girls, however, went away with a regiment ordered elsewhere. Then the wrens are almost all young-the greater number of them being from seventeen to five-and-twenty years old. Then they almost all come out of cabins in country places, and seem still to enjoy-most of them-some remains of the fine strength and health they brought from those wretched cots. Then there was a common look, shocking to see, of hard depravity-the look of hopeless, miserable, but determined and defiant wickedness. Fine faces, and young ones too, were marred into something quite terrible by this look, and the spirit of it seemed to move in the lazy swing of their limbs, and was certainly heard in their voices. And lastly they are dressed alike. All day they lounge in a half-naked state, clothed simply in the one frieze petticoat, and another equally foul cast loosely over their shoulders, though towards evening they put on the decent attire of the first girl I met there. These bettermost clothes are kept clean and bright enough ; the frequency with which they are seen displayed on the bushes to dry shows how often they are washed, and how well. These observations apply to the cotton gown, the stockings, the white petticoat alone-frieze and flannel never know anything of soap and water at all apparently. The "Curragh petticoat" is familiarly known for miles and miles around : its peculiarity seems to be that it is starched but not ironed. The difference in the appearance of these poor wretches when the gown and petticoat are donned and when they are taken off again (that is to say, the moment they come back from the "hunting grounds") answers precisely to their language and demeanour when sober and when tipsy. In the one condition they are generally as well behaved and civil as any decent peasant women need be ; in the other they are like raging savages, with more than a savage's vileness.

Curragh History Archives

Part III.

A COMMUNITY like that which I am attempting to describe naturally falls into some regular system, and provides for itself certain rules and regulations. Fifty or sixty people separated from the rest of the world and existing in and by rebellion against society, naturally form some links of association ; and when the means of life are the same, and shameful and precarious ; when those who so live by them are poor as well as outcast ; and when, also, they are all women, we may assure ourselves that a sort of socialistic or family bond will soon be formed. It is so amongst the wrens of the Curragh. The ruling principle there evidently is to share each other's fortunes and misfortunes, and in happy-go-lucky style. Thus the colony is open to any poor wretch who imagines that she can find comfort in it, or another desperate chance of existence. Come she whence she may, she has only to present herself to be admitted into one nest or another, nor is it necessary that she bring a penny to recommend her. Girls who have followed soldiers to the camp from distant towns and villages-some from actual love and hope, some from necessity or desperation-form a considerable number of those who go into the bush ; and I also learn that the colony sometimes receives some harvester tired of roaming for field work, to whom the free loose life there has, one must suppose, attractions superior to those of the virtuous hovel at home. She walks in and is welcome : welcome are far less eligible immigrants too. Suppose a woman with child who has followed her lover to the camp and loses him there, or is admonished with blows to leave him alone ; or suppose a young wife in the same condition is bidden by her martial lord to go away and "do as other women do" (which seems to be the formula in such cases) ; they are made as welcome amongst the wrens as if they did not bring with them certain trouble and an inevitable increase to the common poverty. I am not speaking what I believe they would do, but what they have done. It is not long since that a child was born in one of these nests ; and wrens had made for baby what little provision it was blessed with ; wrens smiled upon its birth (it was a girl) ; and wrens alone tended mother and child for days before it was born, and for a month afterwards :- then the unfortunate pair went into the workhouse. The mother of the babe which had so strange and portentous a beginning of life had followed its gallant father to the camp from Arklow-a fishing village many a mile away ; but he unfortunately diverted his benevolence into other channels, and she sought refuge amongst the bushwomen when her trouble was near. They did what they could for her, and brought her safely through without recourse to the doctor. Although the birth of an infant is a novel event in the annals of the Curragh, the appearance of a mother with her baby in arms is by no means rare ; and though a child is certainly as much an "incumbrance" there as it can be anywhere, no objection is ever made to it. In fact, a baby is obviously regarded as conferring a certain respectability upon the nest it belongs to, and is treated, like other possessions, as common property. At the present time there are four children in the bush. The mother of one of them is the young woman whose amazing abuse routed my carman, as previously related. Her outrageous blasphemies were uttered over the face of the unhappy little one as it lay at her breast. But even she seems to have the tenderest love for the

Curragh History Archives

babe : she never could bear to think of parting with the “poor darlint,” she says, and she stays at home with it as much as possible, doing duty as watcher at night, while the others are away. The children all seemed to be well cared for. We shall see that an egg is always bought for Mary Maloney’s baby when the day’s provisions are procured, and I found one bright curly-headed little fellow in possession of a doll. Another, a certain little Billy Carson, was produced to me on a Sunday morning, in a rig of which the whole nest seemed proud. He was arrayed in a pretty light coloured stuff frock, for which, I was assured, as much as seven and sixpence had been paid. Should the children fall sick they would be taken at one to the workhouse ; for the doctor is never seen in the bush. In sickness the wrens administer to themselves or each other such remedies as they happen to believe in, or are able to procure ; and when these fail, and the case seems hopeless, application is made at the police barracks at the camp, and the half-dying wretch is carried to Naas Hospital, nine miles off. The medical officers in the camp are, of course, kept too busy amongst the men who are the wrens’ friends to have any time to spare for the wrens themselves. Something more must be said upon that subject by-and-by.

The communistic principle governs each nest, and in hard times one family readily helps another, or several help one ; the deeps are not deaf to the voice of the lower deeps. None of the women have any money of their own. What each company get is thrown into a common purse, and the nest is provisioned out of it. What they get is little indeed ; a few halfpence turned out of one pocket and another when the clean starched frocks are thrown off at night make up a daily income just enough to keep body and soul together. How that feat is accomplished at all in winter-in such winters as the last one-which was talked of only three weeks ago as a dreadful thing of yesterday and its recurrence dreaded as a horrible thing of to-morrow-is past my comprehension. It is an understanding that they take it in turns to do the marketing, and to keep house when the rest go wandering at night ; though the girl whose dress is freshest generally performs the one duty, and the woman whose youth is not the freshest, whose good looks are quite gone, the other. And there are several wrens who have been eight or nine years on the Curragh-one or two who have been there as long as the camp itself. At that time, and long after, they had not even the shelter of a regular built nest. I asked one of these older birds how they contrived their sleeping accommodation then. Said she, “We’d pick the biggest little bush we could find, and lay undher it-turnin’ wid the wind.” “Shifting round the bush as the wind shifted ?” “Thru for ye. And sometimes we’d wake wid the snow coverin’ us, or maybe soaked wid rain.” “And then how did you dry your clothes ?” “We jist waited for a fine day.” Only four or five years ago the wrens were not allowed upon the common at all-at any rate, nowhere near the camp. They were hunted off on account of the extravagant behaviour of one of the women in the presence of a lady (related to a general officer) who was riding on the Curragh. The wretched creature’s audacity cost her companions dear ; they were driven from the common and their hovels were destroyed. A ditch in “Furl-lane,” leading to Athy, was for some time afterwards their only home-those who would not seek shelter in the workhouse or the gaol ; as to which places they have no preference whatever. But by degrees they re-established themselves on the common, and there they remain, a credit to the country. I

Curragh History Archives

may mention here what I had nearly forgotten-which would be a pity-that there is beside the colony I have described another small hive of wrens on the other side of the camp. Their nest is pitched in a field belonging to an intelligent Scotchman. It contains a family of seven. In consideration of the shelter afforded to these wretched creatures by the humane proprietor of the field, who holds a good deal of land round about, they keep a sharp look out for trespassers on the Scotchman's grounds. In this way they probably save the cost of a couple of men and their dogs. Indeed the proprietor himself is said to rate their services much higher, and to boast that "the wrens do his work better than twenty policemen."

Whisky forms, no doubt, a very important part of these poor wretches' sustenance. Whisky kills in the end, or it swiftly destroys all that is comely or healthy in woman or man ; but it can scarcely be doubted that without it the wren could hardly live at all. She would tell you existence would be impossible without it ; and unfortunately it would be of little use to answer that "enough" may be good for food, but "too much" is poison. They get it easily ; they get it from the soldiers when they can get nothing else ; and hunger and cold and wet dispose them too readily to go home with their heads full of drink though their pockets are empty. Then at any rate they are warm ; the appetite for food is drowned ; they are drunk, and being drunk "don't care;" and how not to care cannot always be an undesirable end when your lot is cast amongst the Curragh bushes. But of course even the seasoned wren cannot live by whisky alone ; and I took some pains to ascertain how she did live. Nothing in the world can be got out of the plain itself, not even water ; and the nearest town or village is three or four miles off. But there is the camp within something like half a mile ; and though the wrens are forbidden, under severe penalties, to appear within three hundred and sixty yards of certain defined limits of the camp, the severity of this regulation is relaxed on three days of the week, when a sort of market is held there. A certain number of the wrens are then allowed to approach and make purchases, "just like other people." But the market days at the camp are only three out of the weekly seven-Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday ; and though as a rule the camp's sweethearts do find means to get their daily bread, they have to get it from day to day. At Tuesday's market Tuesday's food may be bought ; but Wednesday's food there is no money for yet. Nor can all they need be bought at the camp market ; and so they pay frequent visits to a certain little store or chandler's shop. Learning this, I also visited the store, for opportunities of observing the particular purchases of the wren. Bread and milk and potatoes were the most conspicuous articles in the shop-in fact, the only articles to be seen in any quantity ; and so it was easy to discover what the good-natured little woman behind the counter was chiefly called upon to supply. I say good-natured little woman, for her manner to the degraded creatures who flocked to her shop was very considerate ; and they seemed to be thoroughly appreciative of its spirit. Bread, potatoes, milk, candles-these were the things most in demand. Thus, one woman carried off a stone of potatoes (12 lb.), twopenn'orth of milk, (in a tin can with a cross handle), a fourpenny loaf of bread, a penny candle, and "an egg for Mary Maloney's baby." Other women made purchases of tobacco, tea, and sugar ; and when these articles are added to the others a pretty complete account is given of the wren's provender. Flesh meat is a rare luxury ; though sometimes a few meagre slices of bacon give token of its

Curragh History Archives

presence amidst half a stone of potatoes. Nor is tobacco a luxury merely. That weed is a well-known stifler of hunger-a fact which the wren discovers for herself before long. Water is a luxury. They would have to buy every pint of it, were they not permitted (on account of a little casualty which may be mentioned by-and-by) to get it from the military train. As it is, they do buy water sometimes of good-natured Mrs. Westley. I was in her shop one day when several wrens were marketing there. All were served but one-a civil and decent-looking girl, whom she detained while she carefully unfolded a little parcel. "There, Nelly," said she, presenting the wren with a sprig of lavender, "put it with your clothes, my dear ; it'll make 'em smell nice." Nelly had never seen a lavender sprig before evidently ; but she took it respectfully, tucked it into the bosom of her gown, and no doubt folded it in that garment when it was set aside. For, as I have said, the women-put off their decent clothes immediately they have no further use for them as ornaments ; for in that sense the print gown and "Curragh petticoat" are regarded. "Fine feathers make fine birds" is a saying as well understood in the bush as anywhere else. Thus, Bridget Flanagan, who had the honour of coming from the capital, was able to put down the pretensions of one of her companions who spoke of Dublin ladies as equals, by exclaiming, "You set yourself along wid such as thim ! Where's your fine clothes ? Where's your jewlree ?"

From all this a fair idea may be gained, I hope, of the intolerable life of the Curragh wren-intolerable to such of us, at any rate, as have any sense of public decency or public duty. We do not hear now of women being found dead amongst the furze, as they say used sometimes to happen, but surely things are terrible enough as they are to demand notice and remedy. It was the death of one of the wretched creatures which led to the granting of water to them from the camp supplies. In the nest where I spent one uncomfortable night, out of a desire to get my lesson thoroughly, a woman named Burns was suddenly taken ill, and in the morning was found dead amongst her companions. In this case a surgeon was brought, and there in the nest (I shuddered as the story was told to me) a surgical examination was made of the poor wretch's body. An inquest was afterwards held in the same shameful place, and evidence taken of her companions. The medical evidence showed that the woman had perished through exposure to the weather and the drinking of foul water-collected anywhere on the common. A verdict to that effect was accordingly returned by the jury, who subscribed the handsome sum of thirteen shillings towards defraying the funeral expenses. She was buried in Kildare churchyard, to which better home she was attended by her companions. That must have been a pretty sight for the parson. No similar death has happened in the colony since Mary Burns perished. The unfortunate creatures hold out as long as they can, and then crawl to the hospital or the workhouse to die there.

Curragh History Archives

Part IV.

VISITING the bushwomen of the Curragh in the daytime naturally seemed to an incomplete way of ascertaining how they really lived. The wren is, of course, a night bird, and ought to be seen at night by any one who thinks it worth while to learn her real characteristics and the part she plays in the economy of the universe. Therefore I ventured on a journey to the bush one evening, making myself as safe as a man can be who goes into haunts of recklessness and crime with nothing about him to tempt cupidity, and with a stout stick for the casual purposes of defence. I did not suppose I should have any extraordinary adventures, but the Curragh is a wide place, and very lonely, and such of the Queen's troops as consort with the bushwomen are often a dangerous character, especially when they happen to be drunk. It was already dark when I set out from that miserable little town, Kildare, directing my steps first towards a landmark uncomfortably called the "Gibbet Rath." Gibbet Rath I made out without much difficulty ; and from that spot made my way across the dark and silent common to the bush village, which, as I have already said, is far in its interior. I had marked the path pretty accurately on former visits ; and, after passing many a bush that might have been a wren's nest, I presently discovered a glimmer of light here and there in the distance, which assured me that I had not gone wrong. These lights were the turf fires of the wrens, burning upon their earthen floors in a homelike way, which, at a distance, was pleasant enough. But arrived amongst the nests a difficulty did arise. Here were several, but how could I distinguish the one at which I could most rely, from previous acquaintance, upon a civil reception ? There were no means of distinguishing it at all ; and after wandering between one and another in a vain attempt to make out No. 2 nest, I resolved to take my chance and enter that which was nearest at hand. This particular nest, however, needed no addition to its assembled company. Peeping in through the hole that is called a doorway, I observed that the bush was tenanted by six wrens, two soldiers, and two little children. The women were smoking, the soldiers roasting potatoes, or "spuds," as they called them, at the fire ; the children, poor little souls ! were huddled amongst the women, awake and lively, and perfectly contented. As soon as my presence was known I was invited to enter. So I went in, just to light my pipe ; and still the women smoked, and the soldiers roasted potatoes, and the children stared about them with innocent inquiring eyes, and a pretty picture of humanity they made crouched and crowded together in the low-roofed little den. But my visit was not to this nest ; and therefore, after a few compliments and the circulation of my tobacco pouch, I ventured to ask my way to No. 2 nest. One of the women rose to show me the way. The others put away their pipes at the same moment, and getting together the various articles of their evening attire, sallied out to dress in "the open." Their stockings were already outside, hanging upon adjacent bushes. These the women gathered, and then proceeded to dress in the light that streamed upon the common from their fire and their one candle. Stockings, boots, the Curragh petticoat, the starched cotton gown, and with a little deft arrangement of the hair, there they stood clean and decent enough-to look at. The toilette being completed, each took a glance at herself in the looking-glass, and then they went away into the

Curragh History Archives

darkness, the soldiers with them, leaving my guide behind. She faithfully showed me to No. 2, and then went back to keep watch till her companions returned from one more excursion into the most dismal swamp of vice where they find their daily bread.

No. 2 nest had also a turf fire burning near the door ; by the light of which I saw, as I approached it, one wretched figure alone. Crouched near the glowing turf, with her head resting upon her hands, was a woman whose age I could scarcely guess at, though I think by the masses of black hair that fell forward upon her hands and backward over her bare shoulders that she must have been young. She was apparently dozing, and taking no heed of the pranks of the frisky little curly-headed boy whom I have made mention of before ; he was playing on the floor. When I announced myself by rapping on the bit of corrugated iron which stood across the bottom of the doorway, the woman started in something like fright ; but she knew me at a second glance, and in I went. "Put back the iron, if ye plaze," said the wren, as I entered ; "the wind's blowing this way to-night, bad luck to it." The familiar iron pot was handed to me to sit upon, my stick was delivered over to poor little Billy Carson, my whisky flask and tobacco were laid out for consumption, and I laid myself out for as much talk as could be got from the watching wren. Billy Carson had not the splendid appearance he wore when I last saw him, in his Sunday frock. His clothes were rags, and they were few and foul. The face of the poor child was of the colour of the earth he sprawled upon ; but there were his thick curly black locks and his great big eyes, so full of fun and sense, of innocence and spirit, as if he wasn't a wren's child at all. While I looked at this unfortunate little fellow, wondering what was likely to be the end of him, and what my own end might have been had I begun life as a wren's little boy, the woman still sat crouched near the fire, with her face hidden on her folded arms, in a very miserable and despairing attitude indeed. I asked her whether the boy was hers, by way of starting a conversation ; she bluntly answered me without looking up that "it wasn't, thank God." I tried again. "Have some whisky ; you're cold." "Indade I am, but it's not whisky that will warm me this night," said she. But next minute, she jumped up, turned some whisky into a cup, tossed it off with a startling rapid jerk of hand and head, went to the looking glass (an irregular fragment as big as the palm of your hand), and wisped her hair up in a large handsome knot. Then the whisky began to operate ; her tongue was loosed. She readily answered all the trifling questions I asked of her, meanwhile putting Billy to bed, who had got sleepy. I was very curious to see how this would be done when she proposed it to Billy, but there was nothing remarkable in the process to reward expectation. The straw was pulled from under the crockery shelf, and Billy was placed upon the heap dressed as he was, with an injunction to shut his eyes. He did so, and the operation was complete.

Of course I wanted to know how my wretched companion in this lonely, windy, comfortless hovel came from being a woman to be turned into a wren. The story began with "no father nor mother," an aunt who kept a whisky-store in Cork, an artilleryman who came to the whisky-store, and saw and seduced the girl. By-and-by his regiment was ordered to the Curragh. The girl followed him, being then with child. "He blamed me for following him," said she. "He'd have nothing to do with me. He told me to come here and do like other women did. And what could I do ? My child was born here, in this very place,

Curragh History Archives

and glad I was of the shelter, and glad I was when the child died-thank the blessed Mary ! What could I do with a child ? His father was sent away from here, and a good riddance. He used me very bad." After a minute's silence the woman continued, a good deal to my surprise, "I'll show you the likeness of a better man, far away !-one that never said a cross word to me-blessed's the ground he treads upon!" And, fumbling in the pocket of her too scanty and too dingy petticoat, she produced a photographic portrait of a soldier, inclosed in half a dozen greasy letters. "He's a bandsman, sir, and a handsome man he is, and I believe he likes me too. But they have sent him to Malta for six years ; I'll never see my darlint again." And then this poor wretch, who was half crying as she spoke, told me how she had walked to Dublin to see him just before he sailed, "because the poor craythur wanted to see me onst more." The letters she had in her pocket were from him ; they were read and answered by the girl whose penmanship I have already celebrated, and who seems to be the only woman in the whole colony who can either read or write. I could not find another, at any rate.

From this woman, so strangely compounded, I learned, as I sat smoking over the turf fire-and the night was bitterly cold-much that I have already related. I also learned the horror the women have of the workhouse ; and how, if they are found straying over the limits allotted to them, they have to appear at Naas to be fined for the offence (a half-crown seems to be the fine commonly inflicted), or to be sent for seven days to gaol. There, according to this woman, they get about a pint of "stirabout" for breakfast, at two o' clock in the afternoon some more stirabout and about a pound of bread, and nothing more till breakfast time next day. I cannot but think this a false statement, and yet she spoke of the workhouse as a place still more unlovely. However, she had suffered so much privation last winter that she had made up her mind not to stay in the bush another such season. "At the first fall of the snow I'll go to the workhouse, that I will !" she said, in the tone of one who says that in such an event he is determined to cut his throat. "Why, would you belave it, sir, last winter the snow would be up as high as our little house, and we had to cut a path through it to the min, or we'd been ruined intirely." In this way she talked, and I listened, and heard how one of the inhabitants of the place I was in had been seduced at the age of thirteen years and four months by an officer in a rifle regiment-a circumstance of which my companion seemed to think there was some reason to be proud. "A rale gentleman he was." In some such spirit one woman declared to me, with a scornful air, "It wasn't one man brought me here, but manny ! and that's the truth bedad !" I also heard that in winter some of the women knit stockings to sell at the camp market, adding a little money to the common stock that way ; and further, that sometimes an officer took a fancy to the companionship of some particular wren, and smuggled her into his quarters.

Presently the report of a gun was heard. "Gun fire !" cried my companion. "They'll soon be back now, and I hope it's not drunk they are." I went out to listen. All was dead quiet, and nothing was to be seen but the lights in the various bushes, till suddenly a blaze broke out at a distance. Some dry furze had been fired by some of the soldiers who were wandering on the common, and in search of whom the picket presently came round, peeping into every bush. Presently the sound of distant voices was heard ; it came nearer and nearer, and its shrillness and confusion made it known to me that it was

Curragh History Archives

indeed a party of returning wrens-far from sober. They were, in fact, mad drunk ; and the sound of their voices as they came on through the dense darkness, screaming obscene songs, broken by bursts of horrible laughter, with now and then a rattling volley of oaths which told that fighting was going on, was staggering. I confess I now felt uncomfortable. I had only seen the wren sober, or getting sober ; what she might be in that raging state of drunkenness I had yet to find out ; and the discovery threatened to be very unpleasant. The noise came nearer, and was more shocking because you could disentangle the voices and track each through its own course of swearing, or of obscene singing and shouting, or of dreadful threats which dealt in detail with every part of the human frame. "Is this your lot ?" I asked my companion, with some apprehension, as at length the shameful crew burst out of the darkness. "Some ov 'em, I think." But no, they passed on ; such a spectacle as made me tremble. I felt like a man respited when the last woman went staggering by. Again voices were heard, this time proceeding from the women belonging to the bush where I was spending so uncomfortable an evening. Five in all, two tipsy and three comparatively sober, they soon presented themselves at the door. One of them was Billy's mother. At the sound of her voice the child woke up and cried for her. She was the most forbidding-looking creature in the whole place ; but she hastened to divest herself, outside, of her crinoline and the rest of her walking attire (nearly all she had on), and came in and nursed the boy very tenderly. The other wrens also took off gown and petticoat, and folding them up made seats of them within the nest. Then came the important inquiry from the watching wren, "What luck have you had ?"-to which the answer was, "Middling." Without the least scruple they counted up what they had got amongst them-a poor account : it was enough to make a man's heart bleed to hear the details and to see the actual money. In order to continue my observations a little later in a way agreeable to those wretched outcasts, I proposed to "stand supper"-a proposition which was joyfully received, of course. Late as it was, away went one of the wrens to get supper, presently returning with a loaf, some bacon, some tea, some sugar, a little milk, and a can of water. The women bought all these things in such modest quantities that my treat cost no more (I got my change and I remember the precise sum) than two shillings and eightpence halfpenny. The frying-pan was put in requisition, and there seemed some prospect of a "jolly night" for my more sober nest of wrens. One of them began to sing, not a pretty song, but presently she stopped to listen to the ravings of a strong-voiced vixen in an adjoining bush. "It's Kate," said one, "and she's got the drink in her,-the devil that she is." I then heard that this was a woman of such ferocity when drunk that the whole colony was in terror of her. One of the women near me showed me her face torn that very right by the virago's nails, and a finger almost bitten through. As long as the voice of the formidable creature was heard, every one was silent in No. 2 nest-silent out of fear that she would presently appear amongst them. Her voice ceased ; again a song was commenced ; then the frying-pan began to hiss ; and that sound it was perhaps which brought the dreaded virago down upon us. She was heard coming from her own bush, raging as she came. "My God, there she is !" one of the women exclaimed ; "she's coming here, and if she sees you she'll tear every rag from your back !" The next moment the fierce creature burst into our bush-a stalwart woman full five feet ten inches high, absolutely mad with

Curragh History Archives

drink. Her hair was streaming down her back, she had scarcely a rag of clothing on, and the fearful figure made at me with a large jug, intended to be smashed upon my skull. I declare her dreadful figure appalled me ; I was so wonder-stricken that I believe she might have knocked me on the head without resistance. But, quick as lightning, one of the women got before me, spreading out her petticoat. "Get out of it !" she shouted, in terror. "Run !" And so I did. Covered by this friendly and grateful wren I passed out of the nest and made my way homeward in the darkness. One of the girls stepped out to show me the way. I parted from her a few yards from the nest, and presently "lost myself" on the common. It was nearly two o' clock when I got to Kildare from my last visit to that shameful bush village.

This scene, which I shall never forget, gave me, so to speak, a bellyful. As I wandered over the common for two good hours, I saw that dreadful woman in imagination at every turn, and her voice disturbed my sleep when at last I did get to bed. I resolved to go no more a-nesting, but to return and write what I have now written, hoping that some good may come of it. I suppose it is not possible to allow such things to continue in a Christian country ?

[Apparently the pamphlet (based on the original newspaper article) was written by a reporter of the Pall Mall Gazette, James Greenwood, who visited the Curragh in 1867 - all spellings etc. have been retained]