Wakeman's Wanderings.

ODD INCIDENTS OF FOREIGN TRAVEL AND . . . OBSERVATION. . . .

LONDON, April 24, 1893.—For the purpose of illustration there is as little difference between the Irish fair and the Irish market-day, as there could be found between "a rale drop of the right sort" and "a drop of the rale right sort," which from time immemorial has been inseparable from the proper conduct of either. The actual difference is this. The Irish fair, whether held at the little village in Donegal or Kerry, or attended by thousands, as at Ballinasloe, Athlone, Cork, Belfast or Dublin, is an affair for the display and sale of animals only—horses, cattle, asses, pigs, sheep, goats, and occasionally poultry. Perhaps eighty Irish towns and cities hold from one to four fairs each year. Some are for the sale of one class of animals only; of hogs as at Limerick or Athlone, or cattle, as at Ballinasloe; of horses, as at probably the greatest annual horse-fair in the world, that of Dublin, or as at at Cushendun, for the exclusive sale of the noted Cushendal ponies bred on the heathery mountains of Antrim, overlooking the weird and stormy Irish Sea. But at most of the Irish fairs all animals bred in Ireland are exposed for sale; at many others farm products may be found; while the great butter fairs of Cork would almost give one the notion that half the world's butter is made in the sunny vales of Ireland's south.

The market-day, on the other hand, is a universal and interminable affair. Hardly a day passed in my nearly a year's wandering in Ireland when I did not come upon some town or village where the fair or the market was in full progress. The area of Ireland is 33,125 square miles less than that of the State of Illinois; yet Ireland boasts of 266 market towns where market-days are held from one to three times every week in the year. All this is picturesque and interesting to the traveler; but my observation leads me to believe that there is vastly too much market, of the sort, and vastly too little to market, of any sort, in Ireland. The shopkeepers, petty traders, and "sheebeen" men like it well enough; for it brings the people together for trimming at both ends of the yardstick; but the tenant system behind it naturally renders this very custom a necessity to the peasantry.

The tenant-farmer, particularly one with a tiny holding, must have, because his condition is never else than precarious, a handy means of ready money. The market-harpies discern with unerring scent all who are pressed for rent or interest money, and they instantly combine against his need and dependency with matchless cunning and blarney. Thus those most needing fair return for the pitiable trifles they are forced to sell are invariably plucked at both ends of their need—by the constant necessity of providing rent money for the landlord, and, at the small market-towns by the buyers who, just as fortune telling Gipsies, learn all the closet-ghosts of half a county before they begin operations, knowing that this one or that one from this place or that, dare not return home without money, contrive to send him back "n'er an shy rod for the lightness that's in his pocket."

Still another reason makes the Irish market-day popular, though disastrous to the acquisition of means among the masses of the people, if better opportunity for securing comfort and competency were possible. The stranger in Ireland can hardly conceive of the barrenness of diversion or incident in the lives of the Irish peasantry. Education and books there are not, save in favored regions. Something must occupy the human mind aside from the scourings of every-day toil. The market-day, in its exchange of countryside greetings, information, forgivable gossipings, simple excitements and general hurly-burly, with this primitive folk stands entirely in the stead of the weekly paper of our own remoter country districts. Indeed it is far more.

The telegraph and the railway penetrate nearly every country of England and America. In more than one hall of Ireland, there are country folk who have never seen a railway car. The market village is still the ultimate of their horizon. The little holding on the mountain-side or in the valley, the little chapel where they gather for Sunday mass, the little village where market-day brings them all together, the rustic dance or wedding with their rude and boisterous convivialities, the wake which most powerful priest or prelate cannot prevent by direct sacerdotal thunderings, and finally the little grave-yard where all must eventually come' provide the farthest outes and bounds of their humble lives.

One may wish it different, but it is idle to discuss it all save on the exact line of their unevential lives; and because the warm Irish heart occasionally yearns for something more "heartsome" than it knows in its scanty cabin surroundings, I do not want the regard of that better-conditioned man who would deny every and environed as these, every hour of diversion and lightsomeness that can be got from either fair, wedding or wake, even if the poor souls return to their dreary homes "a thrifle hearty and soft" for the day's or night's "diversion."

Whatever trifle the tenant-family may have for disposal on market or fair day, the entire family accompanies it. The old mountain-but of a cart is got out and sparingly greased the night before; the ragged donkey or ill kept horse, is given an extra portion of food and additional combings and scraping, that his old bones may gain new luster; and long before day-break, from mountain boreen and mist-hidden valley chattering groups begin moving towards the village.

"The childre dear" are stowed away alongside the pigs, ducks, chickens or vegetables, for the common excitement has kept them awake all night and now over the stoniest of Irish roads they are "slapin rings around their swate selves;" the youths may be trudging hopefully alongside, but the "oold woman" and "oold man," are ever found lovingly bumped together upon the only seat the cart affords, often agreeably exchanging puffs from the same comfortable pipe.

But step with me here beside the way near the town, and see the motley crew constantly augmented in number from every by-way lane and intersecting road. What a queer, kindly lot they are! Here are "the boys," edging along in concentric groups, settling questions of neighborhood moment in tremendous but friendly harangue and dispute. Every manner of cart drawn by every manner of animal, but chiefly by rebellious donkeys, and all piled with every manner of Irish produce and humans, clatter and rattle through the misty morning—carts with sheep bleating piteously with geese craning their necks in vacuously-dazed interrogation; with goats and kids lamenting in pathetic albos and trebles; with pigs grunting and squealing from side to side while snorting violent protests and surprise; and you will notice as you must all over Ireland, that the Irish pig boasts a pink in color and vice with the most radiant flush of the rarest seashell.

All along the way are old men, humped and severe, admitting and protesting in ethics and politics with other calm old men who argue, a priori, in the blandest and most convincing tones. There are women, too, straight as a Cough Patrick fir, glancing with those entrancing Irish eyes, smiling with those ruby Irish lips, and setting the lads wild with that most delicious of all blandishments, the lovable blarney of the musical Irish tongue; while the great packages of yarn they carry without effort would break an American woman's back completely. Not far from them ever are the old, old women with brambeen-covered baskets on their backs.

These contain a few cones of butter, a brace of fowls, may be a dozen or so of eggs, or any other product of the holding or their labor that may "bring a few pence the day;" but old or young, they are knitting away vigorously in time to step and gossip, and all still, old or young, with their shoes slung across their shoulders, or hidden in the baskets, for they are saving them until the edge of the village is reached, where a brass from a whisp of dewy grass will make them shine from their late greasing, and their owners will walk proudly into the fair with their shapely feet hidden from the gaze of men, in brogans that

Wed harm an insulter,
Or hate a deal table,
With mutherin' power
Widin their owners wor able!

It is catch-as-catch-can at an Irish market, or fair. The first upon the ground is best served as to location. At the village market there is no attempt at system or arrangement, and the market-place itself is never a covered structure, but simply a large walled enclosure along the principal street, with gates like a castle, with walls of enormous height and thickness as though attacks from battering-rams were apprehended, and usually it is surrounded, at least on three sides, by the quaintest structures, village homes, inns, groggeries and shops, furnishing as picturesque scenes as the excited groups within the enclosure.

From the market-gates there extend in every direction temporary-avenues by carts ranged side by side with their backs to the way, and the constant crowds coming and going with the large number belonging to each cart, all engaged in heated arguments over values, make much good-natured squeezing and pushing a matter of necessity. There are seldom inner enclosures. Cattle are herded against the walls at one point, sheep at another; pigs on foot, tops gently moving in circles by the skillful use of their drivers' long ash pikes, will be massed at another point; goats and sheep, both extraordinarily combative by the enforced association, at still another; while all manner of lollipop sellers and brave-voiced market-arouse-ment purveyors are huddled together in any extra space that may be found.

For the first hour or two of the morning the sale of the small truck, such as butter, eggs, poultry and vegetables proceeds merrily enough, but the attitude of buyer and seller of whole carloads of potatoes and of all animals is amusing indeed. Buyer and seller, both finally castily depart. The while the Irish yeomen, with folded arms, and none in air expressive of low wages, bid them all a cheerful defiance in ballerous attempts to appear unconscious of their presence.

These double pretenses may proceed until noon with none and then a bargain struck on the sly, but the entire population at the market are on the alert for the seductive wiles of the buyer, and to protect each other effectively from being carried away for fleeting single to the enticing groggeries near. This metaphorical throwing of dust in each others' eyes is carried on during the Belfast fair days, on the first Wednesday of each month, with greater sness and contempt between buyer and seller, than I have seen in any other portion of Ireland. This is particularly true between the factors, or flax-buyers from the mills and the hard-headed peasantry in charge of their card-loads of flax.

Scores of factors will make their appearance; surround the carts; handle the silken "stone" bundles as though it were a pity to bring such stuff to the attention of men whose time was valuable, and condescendingly clap a counterfeit price and order for payment on their respective houses in the sellers' hands, as if a disagreeable duty had been performed; whereupon the sellers toss them back disdainfully or light their pipes with them in fine scorn. Then the factors disappear. But that is not the last of them. One by one or in little groups they return. These stubborn people must be somehow saved from their fatal ignorance. Then follow protestation and rejoinder, blarney and blackguarding, as silvery and fine as ever mmun ears overheard. It is of no avail. Away they all go again. "The byes" calmly resume their pipes and their "goathering" with the old women and young. The next assault by those sleek and ruddy Belfast factors, who are undoubtedly the canniest buyers in the world, is on the confidential line. It is getting late in the day. They come in droves. With military precision the sellers are herded in squads. Palaver, concession, sacrifice and deference (for prices; plunder and division are already cozyledingly agreed upon) effect purchases. The mass of buyers for the Dublin and London markets, men of gigantic stature with red, puffy faces, and great coats hanging over napkins to their heels, each carrying a whip of tremendous length, will manage to take a hasty run about the place, shrugging their shoulders as if nothing worth their attention had been seen, and