

WAKEMAN'S WANDERINGS.

LONDON, May 8, 1893. It may well be imagined that when from 100 to 200 souls leave Ireland for foreign shores every working-day in the year, there are heart and hand wringings innumerable, and dolorous mists from the region of tears. Few families are fortunate enough to get away all together. If help has come from America or the colonies; if the passage money has been saved in secret through years of deprivation by a single person; if an Irish family has after every manner of sacrifice provided for one who is to go to blessed foreign lands that the remainder may, one by one, eventually follow; however the going of all these people may have come about in every instance there is a struggle in tearing away from the things to which the heart is rooted which we of better fortune and conditions literally know nothing.

So many of these scenes have I witnessed that I have perhaps some little conception of the real bravery of this act of illiterate, untrained men and women pushing boldly across oceans into untried, unknown walks and ways, with a love, hope and determination for one's own at the bottom of it all that have more real heroism in them than the average American is ever called upon to exercise throughout his entire life.

However lowly, poor and desperately good-for-naught the prospective emigrant may all his life have been regarded among his fellows, the great and generous heart in those around him melts into surpassing interest and tenderness when he comes to leave his neighborhood, and those whom he has been never so little a part of through the bitter days that have encompassed all. For every departure reawakens the heart-aching memories of other departures; and in every Irish home I ever shared there is an empty chair whose former occupant is somewhere beyond the sea.

If it be a family which is to go, or some elderly man or woman, for days previous to the departure the whole countryside swarms to the cabin; and every man, woman or child of the townland at some time or another has come to mourn at the leaving and bid God-speed at the going. If it be a youth or lass, or young man or woman, as it often is, for few but the very old and very young are left, then, on the evening previous to the departure every companion, friend or acquaintance is certain to appear; and the whole night is passed in what is called "rising the heart" of the departing one.

The custom springs from the same kindly quality of extending cheer to those who mourn that originally established the custom of the Irish "wake," which many good people choose to persistently misunderstand and condemn. At this gathering for "rising the heart" of the emigrant the Irish peasant's character is in a most tenderly interesting state for study. Every one arrives in a hushed, embarrassed mood; and every one brings some little token of affection and regard. The poverty of these folk alone prevents outlandish generosity.

One stealthily appears with yards of seed-cake; many with thimbleful of tea; some with gewgaws and trifles of jewelry; the coat-tail pockets of another will bulge with heartsome potatoes; housewives arrive with great methers of milk, others with schowders, or baten-

cakes, crisp and toothsome, still others with schrabags of shilk, a hearty mixture of potatoes, beans and butter, and some with apronsful of peat; for the slender resources of the family must never under these trying circumstances be drained. And the lads and lasses who come with pressed Irish flowers and ferns, and sprigs of hawthorn and bunches of the dear shamrock; with gifts of ribbons, and bits of this or that prized possession; are not to be counted at all.

So, to, come those with looks of triumph and secreted bottles of poteen, that "never got a touch," that is, are guiltless of the exciseman's desecrating seal; for "grief is ever droothy" surely. Then the night is passed in eating, feasting and drinking. Loads of humble fare are there, oceans of tea; and timely drops of the "rate mountain dew." Tales are told; songs are sung; sometimes they dance to the music of an old tramp fiddler who has been impressed into service. But the chords of mirth are minor enough the night long; and smiles, laughter and brave prophecies are all touched and chastened by honest Irish tears.

When morning comes, and those whose imperative duties call them to their homes have said good-bye with almost the same dread, reverence and pathetic forlornness as when lowering the dead into the grave, the rustic ceremony of "convoying" is begun. The subject of all this attention becomes for the once, if for only this once in a lifetime, the hero or heroine of the hour. The chests, or plethoric bags, or whatever constitutes the luggage of the emigrant, is sent on ahead in some neighbor's proffered cart, friendly riots for the honor of the mournful privilege often occurring, or are slung over the backs of shaggy donkeys, a score more than necessary always being in readiness for this friendly mission.

If a whole family are to go, the farewells to the wretched old hut which has housed them is something pitiable beyond description. If it be but a single member of the household, the good-byes to the old, old folk to feeble for the journey of "convoy" are more pitiable still. These separations are often too great a load for such, and many a withered branch of the impoverished family tree breaks and falls into the earth from the keen, sharp sorrow. But if girsha or bouchal, the pride of the loved home, are departing, the maelstrom of emotion as the "convoy," or accompanying procession, sets forth is beyond the power of man to reveal.

On many occasions during my wanderings afoot in Ireland I have come upon these excited crowds, as they were starting from the home; as they straggled and walled along the great stone highway; or as they neared some railway station whence the emigrant must depart to the seaport city; and making myself one of the motley "convoyer," have thus tramped with them miles upon their sorrowful way.

Sometimes these grewsome processions will come from a point a score of miles away in the mountain, or remote valley districts; and though no one has ever seemed to think their touching and characteristic scenes worth a place in Irish literature, they are common enough from all points and on all ways from which either Moville, or Lough Foyle, in the north of Ireland, or Cork and Queenstown may be reached, and heaven knows pathetic enough to appeal

to the whole world through artist's pencil or the most talented word-painter's pen.

Away up in the Donegal Highlands, in the country of "Colleen Bawn," where that pathetic and true tale threads and thrills through Irish heads and hearts today with the same wondrous power as when it was new, these hours of parting are seasons of storms and tears. I have frequently been at cabins where neighbors in scores and hundreds had kept up the parting doleful cheer for an entire week, and where the intensity of regret and grief took on such wild emphasis at the end, that those who were to have gone missed their sailing day and steamer at Moville, when all the sad business was necessarily repeated.

These Donegal folk, however humble and poverty-cursed they may be, stand straight and tall both in their individuality and upon their strong, long legs. Indeed this often reaches grotesqueness in both respects. While the Irish peasantry, particularly of the South, are frequently diminutive in form and sometimes ferrety in character, these folk seem to possess an inner consciousness of self-importance cut in glowing characters and large lines; while in no few instances they are so straight that fine arcs sweep from their heels to the back of their necks, often giving them the appearance of carrying, and with some disdain, invisible but mighty commissions on the tops of their heads. It is a weird sight to see scores of such as these appearing around the curve of some mighty mountain road, accompanying the emigrant to Stranorlar wailing and almost keening as for the dead; halting and embracing, often struggling for priority in walking beside the hero of the hour; and often so overcome with the violence of their grief as to make despairing rushes with the loved one back towards the old mountain home.

I have many times fallen in with these calvacades winding down from the Derryveagh and Glendowan mountains, or from the Bouthpatrick, Gatigan or Aghla hills, and have walked and halted, and parleyed and soothed in common with the honest souls for miles on their way towards the railway, at Stranorlar. On one occasion the "convoying" party was from the far west, from away over by the howling cliffs of Maghera Bay, where life is very dull and drear, at best. It was a crowd whose faces and strange attire bespoke great poverty. Two children, a lad of seventeen and a girl of perhaps fourteen, were going away. The mother was to remain behind until these waifs could send for her. For the whole company it was the event of their lives, this few miles' mountain journey; and the care for the brave young emigrants, the consideration for the wailing mother, and the latter's grief were touching to behold.

Half the time the lad's companions had their arms about his neck. The girls would carry the sisters on their shoulders, and in seats made by interlacing their fingers; while the mother and the children's luggage had been piled in an old squeaking mountain-but, or cart, which was tenderly drawn by hand. The women crowded about the cart with all manner of endearing and reassuring words of comfort; but the poor woman could not be comforted. As she lay prostrate upon the bundles, there only came from her white lips the endless moan.