

THE ARRAN ISLANDS.

THE three islands known as the Arran Islands stretch like a natural break-water across the entrance of Galway Bay. The largest, Inishmore, is nine miles long and one and a half broad. Inishman and Inishere, of which I shall speak hereafter, are respectively three, and two and a half miles long. A legend in the annals of Ireland states that Galway Bay was once a fresh-water lake known as Lough Lurgan, one of the three principal lakes of Ireland, and was converted into a bay by the Atlantic breaking over and uniting with its waters. Appearances go far to warrant such a belief, though I will not enter into the geological history of it, lest I should get beyond my depth, but will content myself with referring my readers to those geologists who have found in Ireland so inviting a field of research. Where verdure clothes these rugged rocks it is perpetual, and so rich that the finest cattle in the kingdom are grown here. There is no spot in Europe which for its size is richer in antiquities than this. More than one thousand years ago it earned the name of the Isle of the Saints, because holy men came hither in quest of that retirement and learned companionship which were deemed so conducive to sanctity. In a walk of nine miles one meets with the ruins of some fourteen churches, dating from about this period or earlier, along with the ruins of monasteries and hermitages, which show us how these men were content to live. There are, besides, round towers and fortresses which date earlier than any authentic historical record, and exhibit to the imagination these islands, now so desolate, filled with inhabitants active in war and peace. I believe they were in the time of the Druids favorite residences, and perhaps one of the latest strongholds of these people; at least the traveller and historian will find many reasons for such belief.

There are but two roads on the island, and being so little embarrassed in my choice, I took the first to the left, which leads to the once celebrated village of Killeany, and passed for a mile along the edge of the sea, the road being mostly upon a floor of rock. On either side were rude monumental structures, erected, as I learned, in the memory of those who lay buried in a cemetery some two miles off.

These solemn structures lining the road between the two villages of the island, the sea on one side, the stony hills on the other, seemed a novel and impressive way of recalling the dead to those who passed in their daily traffic. The inscriptions upon some of them were so late as the middle of the present century, and from the half-obliterated stones of others, mocking all record, I could not learn when or for whom they were erected.

As I proceeded I saw before me the lonely figure of a man, barefooted and meanly clad. His hands were crossed behind his back, and he held a farthing candle. I accosted him with a remark upon the beauty of the island. He turned his wolfish eyes upon me, and replied, with bitter scorn, "It is a very hard island."

"You are well acquainted with it, I presume?"

"None better. I was born here, and my forefathers before me. I have outlived every one of my family, and have been striving all my life to get away from here."

His tattered garb and wasted body were emblematic of the place, and befitting the progeny of this land of ruins.

Killeany, which I soon reached, is a large and well-built village. It was once of great note for the piety and learning of its founders. Hither came pious men from all parts of Europe to practice the austerities of a religious life; and the ruins which we see on every side tell us, too, that these men brought with them a taste refined by the arts. In those times Killeany was a village of wise men and sainted Tom Tiddlers, who retired to this solitude to prove that they were better than the world they had abandoned. Thus it acquired a renown which won it the name of the "Abode of the Saints." The inhabitants seem to have inherited nothing from the founders who made it so famous, except, perhaps, to imitate their rigid austerity of life, which, while it was chosen by the latter as a proof of piety, is enforced on these poor people by cruel poverty. I have not seen in any part of Ireland people more poorly clad and so pinched by hunger; even the children have wan, old faces, like hunchbacks. They possess no land, and depend entirely upon fishing. During the winter sea-

son the sea is so rough that it is impossible for them to venture out. Their principal food is fish dried upon the rocks. When one remembers that Christianity was introduced here by St. Endeus, or Eaney, so early as the sixth century, it seems impossible that they should have degenerated into such stupid barbarity.

The great church of St. Endeus was demolished by the soldiers of Cromwell to repair the fortified castle of Ardkyne, of which there is a ruin close to the sea. On the highest point of the eastern end of the island is the oratory of St. Benan, a unique specimen of the early Irish church.

Near by, sunk in the rock, are the remains of the hermitage. This church, or oratory, is very small and unadorned—just such a structure as befitted the humbleness of the worshippers who lived in so inaccessible a region. It is useless to secure a guide in this country, for there is always some one living near the remarkable places who seems to consider that his duty is to offer his services, or rather, I should say, to accompany you, without any other preliminary than a careful scrutiny of your appearance, and a simple salutation. An old woman of the village, who appeared to have been able to buy some potatoes or other matter of generous diet, had trudged up the hill to the church. One charm of these dreary old places is the power of calling up vague reveries and pictures of the past, clothing realities with the illusions of the imagination. It needed but a slight exertion of the fancy to transform

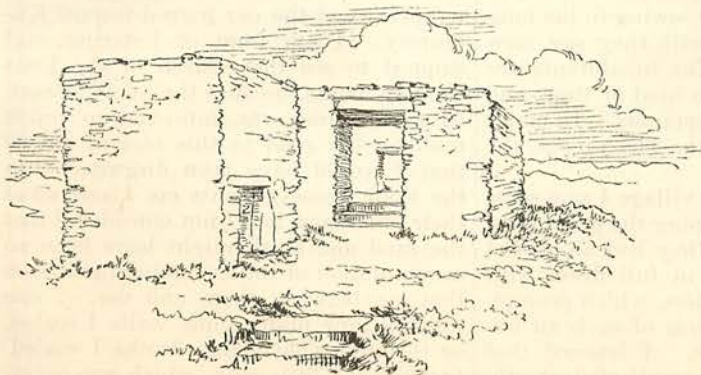


THE ORATORY OF ST. BENAN.

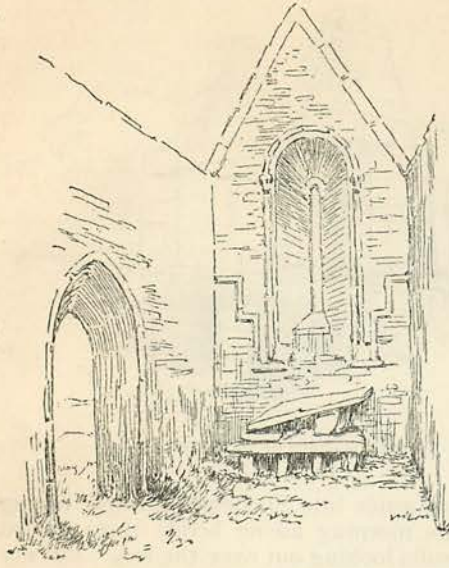
my guide into St. Benan himself, taking his morning airing beside these gabled walls looking out over the sea. But my illusion, which bore so great an impress of reality, was dispelled by the whiffs of smoke from a modern clay pipe in the mouth of my portly guide.

Near by is a residence of the sixth century, which about two years ago was brought to light from a mass of earth and stones. It is built of small and undressed stones, without mortar, and is divided into numerous small compartments, barely large enough for a single person. There were little entryways not more than a foot in width, leading to the remoter rooms, destined, I presume, for the more meagre monks. There are probably twelve or fifteen rooms in this building; the floors and ceilings are all made of the same flinty and rugged stones. What was evidently the main entrance had somewhat an imposing appearance, being reached by four steps, at whose base there was built a little kennel, which, if it was not for a dog, was made by some monk more austere than the rest; he had, however, chosen a southern exposure for his penance.

As I gave a parting glance at the sea, I saw a bank of clouds melting into it in the distance. It looked like land, but in that



A DWELLING-HOUSE OF THE SIXTH CENTURY.



CHURCH OF THE FOUR COMELY SAINTS.

direction the nearest land was America. I remembered then that from these cliffs the famous Hy Brazil was said to have been seen. Arran is still believed by the peasantry to be the nearest land to the far-famed O'Brazil, or Hy Brazil, the blessed paradise of the pagan Irish. Mr. Hardiman derives the name Hy Brassil, or Brazil, from *bras*, fiction; *aoi*, island; and *ile*, great—*i. e.*, "the great fictitious island." The old bards and popular tradition describe it as a country of perpetual sunshine, abounding in rivers, forests, mountains, and lakes. Castles and palaces arise on every side, and as far as the eye can reach it is covered with groves, bowers, and silent glades; its fields are ever green, with sleek cattle grazing upon them; its groves filled with myriads of birds. It is only seen occasionally, owing to the long enchantment, which will, they say, now soon be dissolved. The inhabitants are ever young, taking no heed of time, and lead lives of perfect happiness. In many respects it resembles the Tirna-n'oge, the pagan Irish elysium.

On our way to the village I saw some odd-looking sheep nipping the grass from between the rocks. They had an absurd appearance of being in full dress, with bare necks and shoulders, which prompted me to ask the reason of such an unseemly out-door toilet. I learned that they were originally as well clad as others of their species; but in this region a

family rarely owns more than one animal, and they shear off as much wool at a time as they deem necessary for a pair of stockings; so the poor beasts are forced to go all day long in what would in civilized countries be called a strictly evening toilet. While our bare necks and shoulders, however, warm nobody, it is satisfactory to think that theirs are warming the lean legs of their owners.

Any one who has a fondness for shopping could, I think, be radically cured by a sojourn on these islands, as the nearest shops are at Galway, twenty-nine miles distant, and the only means of getting there is by a small yacht that goes once a week, weather permitting. One journey on board of it, along with pigs, fish, peasants, sundry oil cans, and musty boxes, with the prospect of tossing about for ten or twelve hours, will suffice for a long while. The luxuries of the table at the hotel are confined to mutton, boiled and fried, with the usual colossal platter of potatoes, varied only by bacon and cabbage. I saw a few chickens sheltering themselves under the walls, and observing me with an unfriendly eye, as if they saw in a stranger a Moloch who would reduce their number. Prompted probably by this idea, I asked for one for my dinner, but regretted having taken him from his companions, with whom he had lived so long; for he seemed to have been brought here by the early Christians, or, perhaps, had escaped at a remote date from some pagan sacrifice.

It was December, yet the sun was bright and the air soft and balmy, when I started for Dun Aengus, a fortress pronounced by Dr. Petrie to be the most magnificent barbaric monument now extant in Europe. The sun was so warm that I discarded my wrappings as the car joggled toward Kilmurrey. I am fond of loitering, and stopped to see the church of the Four Comely Saints, because the name attracted me. There was, however, so much mud on the road to this blessed chapel that I would have been disgusted with the Four Comely Saints ere I arrived at their sanctuary, had I not considered that the mud and slush might have been an accumulation of the eleven hundred years that lay between them and me. I can not tell how many stone walls I scaled, or through what grimy depths I waded, to reach the little ruin, which was covered with weeds and tangled vines. There

is an east window and altar-place in excellent preservation, and, near by, a niche, the carving of the base of which was as fresh as if made yesterday; but all above was filled by the clustering ivy, which strove, I thought, to fill the cavity left vacant by the absent saint. Although the chapel is small, it is of beautiful proportion, and the four saints seem to have left their comeliness as a perpetual heirloom to these walls.

When I arrived at Kilmurrey, one of those storms which come from the Atlantic, and in an instant envelop these islands in a cloud of wind-driven mist, made me seek refuge in a cabin. It was a crowded, busy peasant's home, and as I sat by the fire—the warmest seat being given me with the invariable hospitality of these people—I found abundant material for observation and reflection. Whatever cleanliness was possible in a family of eight occupying one huge room along with two pigs was carefully maintained; at least, the mother and children were neatly and comfortably attired, the hearth well swept, and the pigs were confined to the limits assigned them. An old woman was carding wool, a little child rocking the cradle, and the mother spinning at a large wheel. The chickens, also driven in by the rain, one by one hopped up a ladder to their roosts among the rafters, from which they watched over their ruffled feathers the busy family and the blazing hearth with so much approval and satisfaction that I am sure, if chickens be susceptible to emotion, these were very tender ones indeed. A dog sneaked in, and seeing a stranger, went out into the rain again. The dogs, which are not numerous on the island, are of the most miserable and condemned aspect, and seem to feel their ignoble ancestry, as they invariably jumped over a wall or ran into some obscurity on the approach of a stranger. While drying my dripping garments, I saw for the first time, seated in a corner, as if to screen himself from observation, the figure of a young man clad in white flannel, the costume of the island. His face was thin and sad, and of the same color as the garments he wore, and he gazed at the fire with such a dejected and hopeless expression as led me to infer that he was the fated victim of some terrible disease—consumption, perhaps—and was feebly waiting through the long hours of the day and night the death he knew to be

so sure and near. I spoke to him, striving in my pity to appear unconscious of perceiving his misery. Without answering, he rose abruptly and left the cabin. The looks of concern and inquietude in the faces about me told me of some unusual sorrow, which the mother, leaving her spinning-wheel, explained to me in a low voice. She told me that the young man, her eldest son, poor Owey, as she called him, had until a month before been the most healthy and cheerful member of the family; ready and prompt at work, and the life of the household, when a letter came from America to a neighboring family inclosing money to pay the passage thither of their eldest daughter. It appeared that the young man had long entertained a secret passion for this girl, and when he heard that he probably would never see her again, he declared his love to her, and besought her to remain. So far from being unmindful of his affection, she avowed her willingness to marry him at once, if he would accompany her to America immediately afterward. This was impossible; his own family were unable to assist him, and the few people who possess money on the island would not lend it without security. The practical damsel saw on the other side of the Atlantic every prospect of improving her material condition, and doubted not that husbands were as plentiful there as elsewhere; while, if she remained, she knew the drudgery and hopeless slavery that were the lot of all around her would be hers also. Therefore she told her suitor if he could not accompany her she would not listen to his suit. When the young man found his upbraidings useless, he gave way to despair, and had not worked or spoken since his cruel sentence had been pronounced. Every day he grew thinner and more wan, and he did not partake of sufficient food to support life. All the solicitude and tenderness of his mother had not succeeded in arousing within him his former self, and with tears running down her cheeks she told me she thought he had lost his reason forever.

Some weeks previously the school-master had written for them to a priest, a distant relative of the family, who lived in Connemara; but they had received no reply, and she supposed he had neither help nor counsel to give. I pondered for a long while, as I sat by the fire, upon what often proves to be the unfortunate sin-



MY GUIDE AT FORT ÆNGUS.

cerity of men, and I could not refrain from deploring the no less frequent levity of my own sex. In passing through the village a week afterward I stopped to say good-day to these kind people, when I found the house a scene of bustle and confusion. My erewhile love-sick swain was, when I entered, making himself a pair of pampootees; and as he bade me good-day over a dangerously starched collar, his face glowed with health and energy. The now cheerful and happy mother informed me that since my last visit they had received a letter from the priest in Connemara, inclosing his blessing for her son, and the money to pay his passage to America. She had been very busy knitting him stockings, and making him a fine white flannel suit to be married in, and which thereafter he would not again wear till his arrival at New York, so that he would make a decent appearance in the New World, as became the relative of a priest. He was to be married to the object of his choice the next day, and they

were to start immediately afterward upon their long voyage. As I left, the damsel, whose month's delay to prepare her outfit had given such a fortunate respite to her lover, thrust her head in the door, and called upon Owney to be sure and wear the blue stockings she had knitted him to the chapel on the morrow; and then, with her little *retroussé* nose turned up to the sky, ran blushing away.

But to continue my narrative. When the mist had blown over, I left the cabin, and began a difficult ascent to Dun Ængus, which crowned the cliffs overlooking the sea on the opposite side of the island. My guide was a youth of about nine years, whose attire consisted of a red petticoat, and at least a shirt collar, which was ostentatiously displayed over his bodice, an Irish cap resembling the top of a mushroom, blue stockings, and sandals, called pampootees, made of untanned cowhide, universally worn by the in-

habitants of these islands. Instead of the treacherous bogs, which my foot-paddling in Ireland had familiarized me with, I had now rocks and stones of every dimension and ruggedness to contend with. I may here mention that in the Arran Isles there are no bogs, therefore no turf; and as trees are unknown, all fuel is brought, at considerable expense, from Connemara. My guide danced with such agility and recklessness from stone to stone that I was not only much concerned lest his thin legs should break beneath him, but was also a good deal out of breath and out of patience in my efforts to keep pace with him. In response to my repeated injunctions, however, he restrained himself so much as to run around me like a dog, instead of running ahead of me like a hare. Motion seemed to be a necessity of his existence, for I verily believe he did not remain a second in one spot. When I asked him a question as he bounded at my right, he answered me from the left, and it took some little circumspection to adapt my

conversation to the movements of this strange will-o'-the-wisp.

"Do you know how much gentlemen and ladies give me for showing them up to Dun Ængus? Two and three shillings," he continued, on my negative response. And then he eyed me with such a keen and mercenary expression that I was astonished to see it in so young a face. I expressed my surprise at the generosity of the ladies and gentlemen whom he had escorted; but this was not to his purpose, for he asked me point-blank how much I intended to give him.

"A shilling," I replied.

"Oh," he cried, "no lady or gentleman ever gives me a shilling, but always two or three."

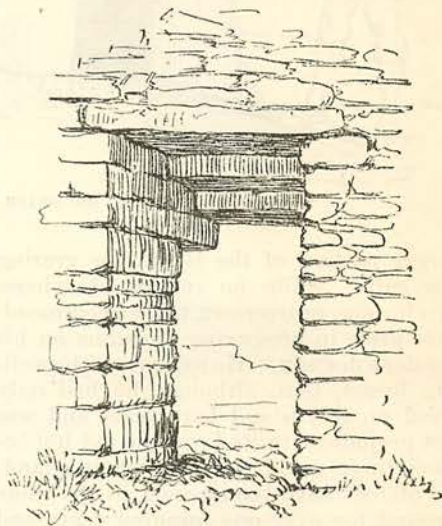
My reader perceives that it is not always civilization which makes humanity sordid, as he will admit that this child of nine years displayed ere I bade him good-bye a persistent rapacity worthy of the most accomplished Shylock. Until we arrived at the fort, he strove by every possible artifice and argument—so much beyond his years in skill that I would have believed him an elfish changeling had I been credulous in such matters—to convince me that two shillings was the lowest possible sum I could offer him consistent with my own gentility and his services.

The Dun, or fort, is built on the very edge of a precipice which stands three hundred feet above the sea. It is in horseshoe shape, the open side facing the sea. It consists of three inclosures, the innermost wall being the thickest; this inclosure measures one hundred and fifty feet from north to south. About the first century of the Christian era three brothers came from Scotland to Arran, Ængus, Conchovar, and Mil, and their names are still preserved in connection with buildings on the islands. The walls are eight or ten feet thick, built of comparatively small unhewn stones, without mortar, which manner of construction, we are told, affords less resistance to the wind, and is more durable, than the cemented edifices of later date. There is a doorway in perfect preservation, wherein the admirable ingenuity of the builders is shown; the immense thickness of the wall, and consequently great weight upon the lintel, is broken by several gradations, as it were, of supports, as shown in my sketch.

My youthful companion, who had been

dancing about me with the utmost impatience during my researches, informed me, when we reached a certain point of the outer inclosure, that that was the consecrated place for paying him, and assured me that though he did not speak at all in his own interest, if I wished for good luck I would pay him then and there.

"It's many a shilling," he said, "you have given to people—mere robbers—while you've been travelling about; but all that 'll be so much bad luck to you unless you pay me well now." With the respect which I always observe for the



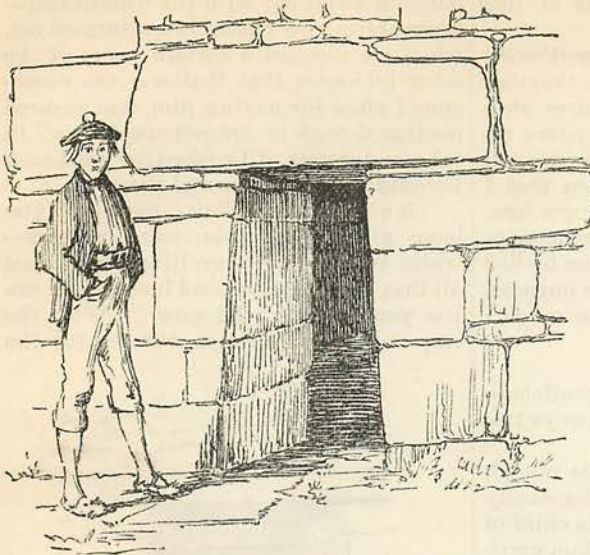
DOORWAY, FORT ÆNGUS.

manners and customs of the country in which I travel, I immediately gave him a shilling, which he held between his thumb and finger, and with a look of indignant reprobation, his cold eye resting upon me as steadily as that of the Ancient Mariner on the wedding guest, he added, "Is that all you'll give me?"

I assured him that it was. "If you'll add twopence," he said, "good luck will be with you; but if you don't, you'll be misfortunate for all the days of your life."

I gave him the twopence, which I am sure the wedding guest would have willingly given the Ancient Mariner to have escaped his gimlet eye; and in some fear of this indefatigably mercenary child, I descended the cliffs as the shades of evening came on.

In the twilight I visited Teampull Mic Duach, a most interesting ruin, upon the grounds of a gentleman who rents the



DOORWAY OF TEAMPULL MIC DUACH.

larger portion of the island for grazing his cattle, while he resides elsewhere. His farmer, or overseer, takes a commendable pride in preserving the ruins on his master's domain. He told me, with swelling breast, that, although he had only lived on this island four years, and was not prejudiced in its favor, he did not believe there could be finer farming land. "Potatoes have been grown in the same ground for over one hundred years, and the cattle reared here, though never housed, and allowed no food save their pasture, take prizes in the English and Irish fairs." I thought the grazing must be rich, for even when in certain rocky wastes it grows in the fissures of the rocks, the land, if land it may be called, is carefully fenced off, and rented at so much per acre. Indeed, the whole island is fenced off in little plots, from a few yards to half an acre in extent, for no other reason, that I could perceive, than that they knew not what other disposition to make of the stones, although as many were left on the ground as would make a thousand such walls.

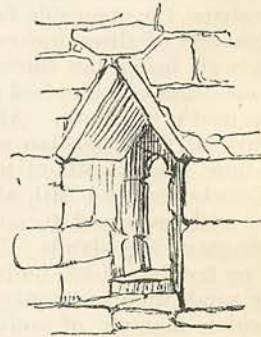
Teampull Mic Duach is certainly a beautiful little church. Antiquarians have decided that it was built in the sixth century, and the enormous undressed stones used in its construction, fitted with admirable exactitude, no cement being used, show that the builders of those times not only thought a great deal about their

work, but exercised a constructive ability not excelled in modern times. There is a window giving a curious example of a primitive kind of pointed arch. Two flat stones form the lintels, so nicely adjusted that, notwithstanding the extreme thickness of the walls, it is to-day as perfect as when constructed thirteen hundred years ago. The origin of the pointed arch has been claimed by many nations, but the best authorities declare that while it was introduced into England and the Continent in the time of the Crusades, probably from the East, it was used in Ireland long before there was any intercourse between the two countries; and Wilkinson says that though he does

not claim that the pointed arch originated in Ireland, it existed there prior to the period when the pointed style was introduced through England to that country.

The doorway of this little church is, curiously enough, an almost perfect copy of an entrance to an Egyptian tomb, simple and grand.

At the northwestern extremity of the island are the ruins of the seven churches,



STONE WINDOW, TEAMPULL MIC DUACH.

lying in a hollow between a little village and the sea. There are portions of two which are in only a tolerable state of preservation; others have fallen, leaving an altar or some piece of carved stone that belonged to a window or doorway. An old man issued from a little hovel in the village, having evidently been informed of my arrival by some staring children

who had retreated at my approach. He saluted me as he hobbled down from grave to grave, and asked me if I had ever been there before; if not, he might as well go with me, for he knew every inch of the place, having lived here nearly eighty years. Between his remarks he would stoop and pluck little wisps of grass, and brush some old tombstone with affectionate care, or break the brambles that crept over them.

Teampull Breacain, or the Church of St. Breacain, has a chancel of rude masonry, and a choir that is more modern—when I say modern in this case, I mean a date of four or five hundred years ago. In this, as nearly all the old churches of Ireland, the principal window is on the east, immediately over the altar. The floor is paved with graves, many of the slabs bearing recent dates, every nook and corner being filled with bones of the former occupants, which have been disturbed to give room to newcomers. The Old Mortality who acted as my guide slipped through the archway into the chancel, and pointing with his staff to a large stone in the corner, said, with an air of pride, that he had two sons—fine boys—under it. I asked if his name was upon it.

“No, your honor; but I know they are there, and there was nothing in it but this,” pointing to a fragment of a skull that filled a gap made by a fallen stone.

We sauntered about among these relics for a long time, where at every turn something rare presented itself. The Aharla, or sacred inclosure, where only saints were buried, is still visible, with undeciphered inscriptions upon the slabs. A few rags fluttered on some bushes by what I thought was a

small cave; but the old man said it was a holy well, that it was dry just now, but when the day of the patron saint arrived it was always full—in the summertime. The greatest curiosity he reserved until the last. On an old tombstone was placed a rare and beautiful cross, broken evidently by force, for the stone shows no signs of decay, the fragments of which he told me had been found in various parts of these sacred grounds. Seating himself upon a grave, he related in the most solemn manner the history of the search for the pieces—how earnest had been his desire to bring together the remains, so that he could see the fulfillment of prophecy. When St. Breacain preached in this church a holy man visited him, and addressed the people; he meant only to say a few words to them, but as he stood by the altar a divine light descended upon him, and illuminated his face and breast. He was inspired to tell them that they would be



OLD MORTALITY—INTERIOR OF TEAMPULL BRECAIN.



DOORWAY OF TEAMPULL CHIARAIN.

persecuted and beaten, their churches and crosses destroyed, but their religion would outlive it all, and the crosses would be restored piece by piece. "And I have been allowed to see the truth of it," he added; "there is only one piece wanting to that cross, and it will be found in God's own time."

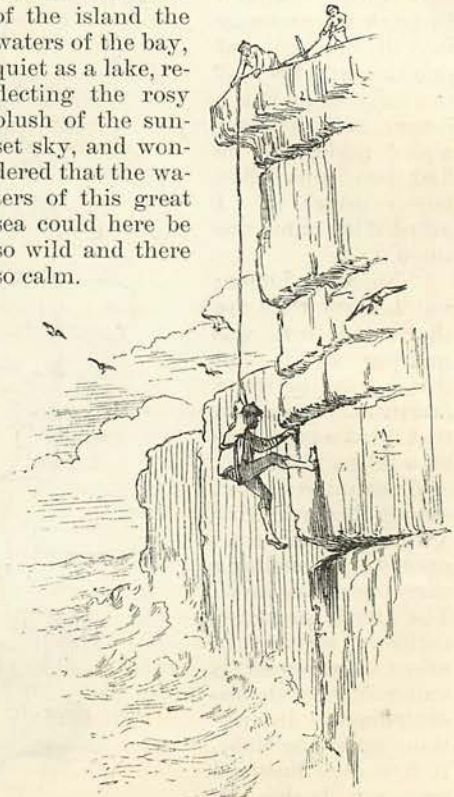
A Scotch mist had so much overcome its national prejudices as to visit Ireland the day I started for Teampull Chiarain, one of the many churches on this little island. Again I encountered a formidable array of stone fences. I reached the church, however—which stands in the midst of a potato field—after a great deal of difficulty. It is one of the best-preserved on the island, having a beautiful east window, and a striking doorway, which gives an instance of the simple construction and common application of the arch in the various ancient edifices of Ireland, formed in most buildings of two stones only, which appear to have been worked from one, and afterward split in the centre.

The next day I grew weary of the sheltered and inhabited side of the island, for the weather was so soft and balmy that one was invited to the open air. I sallied forth to where the cliffs present their rocky front as a barrier to the ocean, which in his wrath dashed against them with such mad fury that the surf rose in many places far above them, and the dark and awful green of the sea was thrown

back from these terrible cliffs into the boiling caldron below as white as the driven snow. Here the Black Fort, as it is called, frowns over a fearful precipice. It resembles Dun Ængus in character, though it is much smaller, and in less perfect preservation.

I observed on the very verge of the cliff two figures manœuvring a large rope, as though they were fishing for sea-monsters. As I approached I saw that the end of the rope was attached to no monster, but to a man, who was delving into the crevices for some treasure, and the aerial anglers were moving the rope in accordance with signals made by a wave of his hand. When he arrived at the crevices in which the sea-birds made their homes, he seized dozens of them ere they could escape, and, loaded with his prey, he placed his feet against the perpendicular cliff, and while he was dragged by his friends above, walked up like a fly.

As I turned my steps homeward, the noise of the mighty waves as they broke against the cliffs filling my ears, I saw on the other side of the island the waters of the bay, quiet as a lake, reflecting the rosy blush of the sunset sky, and wondered that the waters of this great sea could here be so wild and there so calm.



BIRD-CATCHING.