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A June Trip to Ireland

Scott Polar Research Institute
Cambridge, England
June 29, 1959

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New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

We have just returned from a 1500 mile, seven-day auto trip to Ireland. The fine weather, the long days (light until 10:00 P.M.) and the current Presidential election were all factors which led us to go off at this time on what turned out to be a most delightful journey to this island, only one-third the size of Britain.

As prior reading helped to sweep out some of the cobwebs of our memory of Irish history, and therefore to understand better the country and its people, it may be of some interest to sketch briefly here some of the more salient aspects of these island peoples.

The Early Peoples of Ireland

All archaelogical evidence leads to the conclusion that Ireland is not an island of the North Sea, as is Britain, but rather an island of the Atlantic. Culture came to Ireland not from Britain but from the southwest - from Spain across the Bay of Biscay in Neolithic times.

Although no certain traces of Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age) inhabitants of Ireland have been found, man is known to have lived there in Middle Stone Age times (perhaps around 6000 B.C.) During the Neolithic (or New Stone) Age, the migration of Mediterranean peoples (probably Picts) to Ireland took place about 2000 B.C.

They brought with them a knowledge of agriculture, they produced pottery, and left behind several distinctive remains. Perhaps the best known are the early megalithic chambered stone tombs known as "Court cairns." Some of these cairns, which are found chiefly in the north, are covered with rather interesting decorative carvings.

Related to these tombs are the "stone circles", which served as prehistoric temples, and, in later times, served the Druids. However, the most impressive of their structural accomplishments are the cashels or "ring-forts" built of dry-stone walling. These, the most numerous type of monument to be seen in Ireland, were used as dwelling sites, and continued to be built until the Anglo-Norman invasion. They were circular ramparts, about five feet thick at the top, and about 20 feet in height. They usually enclosed houses of wood or partly stone construction.

These early peoples, without benefit of additional migrations (as was the case in Britain) ushered in the Early Bronze Age to Ireland (2000 - 500 B.C.) by way of extensive trade with Europe. They were helped by rich deposits of copper in the south, but tin had to be imported - probably from Cornwall.

A distinctive feature of this period was the production of native gold, which gave Ireland a distinctive position during the Bronze Age. Many gold trinkets and other objects have been found - now on display at the National Museum in Dublin.

Although these peoples carried on considerable commerce, they were evidently illiterate. No writings or documents have been found. In contrast to most of Europe during this period, they remained in undisturbed possession of the country for over 1500 years.

The Celts 350 B.C. - 400 A.D.

The first Celtic immigrants arrived perhaps as early as 1000 B.C. Small colonies were established along some of the coasts, but evidently no contact was made with the Picts until about 350 B.C. At this time began the successive invasions by the Celts, which were to continue for several centuries.

These Celtic tribes easily conquered the country and established a distinctively Celtic culture. They brought with them iron weapons, with which they had been subduing successively all the petty peoples of Europe north of the Alps. They also brought their peculiar linguistic characteristics and a vastly superior military organization.

The Celts, in time, effected a complete revolution in the life of the country. Their Celtic speech completely ousted the aboriginal Pictish. Their Indo-European patriarchal organization took the place of the aboriginal matriarchate. New gods, new methods of government, and new arts and crafts were introduced. There was apparently little intermarriage, and the aborigines, short and dark peoples, were soon reduced to vassalage by their tall, fair-haired conquerors of Nordic origin.*

The Anglo-Saxons, the invaders of Britain who largely replaced the Celtic population there, did not greatly affect Ireland - and neither did Rome. For some unknown reason the Romans, who occupied Britain for 400 years, never came to Ireland.

During this time when Ireland remained relatively untouched by foreign invaders it proceeded to enjoy its golden age of culture. Society was based on an aristocratic pattern, and people were established into clans or tribes which owed allegiance to one of five provincial kings, who in turn nominally served the Ard-Ri, the high king of all Ireland at Tara. These clans fought bitterly and con-

* They seem to have originated from the area between the headwaters of the Rhine and the Danube.

stantly among themselves, but after the introduction of Christianity into the country, relative peace was maintained.

The Druids, an association of professional wise men, philosophers in the early Greek sense, were accepted as authorities on matters of religion and law. They had developed from among the pre-Celtic inhabitants - from the seers and sorcerers - but were oppressed after the beginning of the Christian era.

The Celts and Christianity, 350 - 900 A.D.

The country was already partly Christianized before the arrival of St. Patrick in 432 A.D. Born in Britain of Christian family of Roman citizenship, St. Patrick became one of the most successful missionaries in all history. By his death in 461 the country was almost entirely Christianized.

In the following centuries the church produced many scholars and fostered the growth of literature. Of the several famous manuscripts of that time, the seventh century Book of Kells (from the Celtic monastary at Kells) is perhaps the best known.

During this period most buildings were of wooden construction, and none have survived. But some, built entirely of stone and without the use of mortar, still exist. These structures, called "oratories", were erected as early as the seventh century.

High crosses, carved of stone, and usually in typically Celtic ringed form, are found in great variety of detail in all parts of the country. They were made as early as the fourth century, with low relief carving appearing about the seventh century. After the Irish missions to the continent began in the sixth and seventh centuries, the stone building in the country improved rapidly, and a Romanesque style was introduced.

About this time the Old Irish language was developing from the early Celtic with additions from Latin.

The Viking Invasions, 800 - 1000 A.D.

Although the Christianized Celts were responsible for a great surge in the arts and crafts, and for the introduction of the Celtic language into Ireland, they did not develop a strong central government. They were neither united nor prepared to meet the Viking sea invasions which began to hit the country at the end of the eighth century.

Norsemen, followed by Danes, raided the coasts and penetrated along the rivers. Considered sea-robbers, they found the abbeys of Ireland such comparatively easy prey that they eventually established "jumping-off" places around the coast. But as soon as they discovered

that the treasures of the abbeys were not inexhaustible, and that trading was more profitable than plundering, they became great pioneers of commerce and laid the foundations of the first Irish cities where they had settled - Dublin, Cork, Waterford and Limerick. All are at the head of estuaries andcommand good waterways into the interior. Ultimately, by intermarriage and association, they became a part of the Irish nation.

During these Viking invasions the native people erected a rather interesting type of structure called a "round tower". These towers, found in many parts of Ireland, served as refuges and for watch purposes. Always built near a church, they are of stone, tall (60 - 120 feet in height), slender, and gracefully taper towards a conical stone roof. Some 120 are known to have existed, and 70 survive today.

A Free Ireland, 1014 -1169 A.D.

The end of the tenth century saw a revival of the native tribes. In 1014, at Clontarf, Brian Boru, who had become high king by conquest, broke the hold of the Vikings, and for 150 years the country was free of foreign invaders. However, the same weaknesses prevailed and the country slipped back into war-torn chaos.

Anglo-Norman Conquest, 1169 - 1800

The struggle was begun in 1169 by Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke (known as Richard Strongbow), when overlordship of Ireland was granted to Henry II of England by Pope Adrian IV (an Englishman.) Strongbow landed near Wexford on the southeast coast, and,after several early victories, took advantage of the inter-tribal struggles to extend his conquests. Later Anglo-Normans obtained a firm hold around the coasts and gradually took possession of the fertile lowlands - with the mountains becoming more and more the strongholds of the Irish.

Henry II himself arrived in Ireland in 1172 at the head of a large army, but it did not become necessary to use it. The Irish Chieftain of Desmond, Dermot Mc Carthy, who was in possession of the city of Cork, was the first Irish chieftain to make his submission to the king. In return, he was promptly thrust out of his city, which was without delay strongly fortified by the English.

This then was the first of an unending line of treachery, violated treaties, cruelty and mis-rule which was to characterize English domination for the next 800 years. It commenced an Anglo-Irish struggle, which cannot yet be said to have reached a final conclusion.

The Irish were denied the benefit of English law and old Irish customary law had been split apart. Anglo-Norman rapacity in Ireland led to the seizure of much land and began the extremely unfortunate absentee landlord-tenant problem that has plagued the Irish until recent times.

The traditional life of the country was completely overturned, and the immediate result of the invasion was the almost total extinction of the traditional arts. Typical of the resultant chaos is that strange product, Irish Gothic architecture. There is nothing like it anywhere else. It is a curious jumble of styles and periods. It was violently forced on the country from without and was never assimilated.

The next few centuries saw conditions worsen; the clans continued their lawless struggles among themselves and the English settlers became assimilated into the pattern.

Henry VIII was the first English monarch to bring all Ireland under English control and to Anglicize the Irish chieftains. By this time the Irish people, even the nobles, had sunk into desperate proverty, a situation that was to exist for centuries.

Then England became Protestant, and the "Penal Laws" were instituted against Catholics. Since the entire Irish nation remained Catholic except for the few English settlers, the conflict between the disinherited Irish and the English masters took on a religious cast. All Irish were excluded from civic life.

These conditions led to three formidable rebellions in the time of Elizabeth I, all of which were crushed by soldiers turned loose to pillage and murder in the country. Scottish soldiers were planted in Ulster at this time, and took root there - the beginning of a very difficult situation with two permanent and antagonistic communities.

The Irish continued to be restless. A ten-year rebellion beginning in 1641 cost 600,000 lives and was brutally crushed by Oliver Cromwell, whose massacre of the Irish is still bitterly remembered. A confiscation of more land took place (11,000,000 of the best acres by Cromwell). A ruthless policy of extermination was followed, and native peoples beyond the Shannon were evicted from their holdings which were parcelled out among adventurers, many original holders remaining as serfs.

The years following these events, with increasing evils of absentee landlordism, continued economic exploitation on the one hand and the forbidding of exports on the other, an action which killed the newly flourishing woolen industry, caused organized opposition to grow rapidly.

In 1782 Ireland demanded and received an independent Parliament. Finally in 1800, under the British Prime Minister Pitt, England and Ireland were united, and Ireland was unwillingly represented in the British Parliament.

Ireland under the Union with Britain, 1800 - 1921

Pitt tried to help the Irish, but was blocked by George III, and it was only through the mass agitation, led by Daniel O'Connell, that the Catholic Emancipation Act was finally passed in the English Parliament in 1829.

Meanwhile the pressure of a growing population became acute. The trend had been encouraged by the introduction of the potato early in the 18th century. As it produced a large crop and required little attention, it soon became a popular, then necessary part of the Irish diet. When the potato blight struck in 1846-1851, some 1,000,000 Irish died of malnutrition and outright starvation and another 1,600,000 emigrated (mostly to the U.S.) out of a population of over 8,500,000. Between 1851 and 1905 another 4,000,000 left the country, leaving the land denuded of population, a situation which still exists. Today there are only 2,953,000* in the Republic even though there is a high birth rate and families are large.

As the evils of the English absentee landlordism became more serious, the Irish were seething under the system whereby tithes were forcibly collected from them for the support of the Established Church. Finally, after much agitation and conflict, the Anglican Church of Ireland was disestablished in 1869.

By 1870 Irish opinion crystalized in a Home Rule movement to end the Union under the brilliant leadership of Charles Parnell. This movement, which emphasized the use of constitutional means, was later supplemented and then superceded by Sinn Fein, which was devoted to attaining complete independence. Conditions led to the famous Easter Rebellion in 1916 and the subsequent guerrilla warfare of 1918.

Establishment of the Irish Free State (1921) and the Republic of Ireland (1949)

After negotiations between Lloyd George and Eamon de Valera, the American-born leader of Sinn Fein, the Irish Free State was established in 1921, and 28 years later Ireland became an entirely independent country.

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Our route from Cambridge first took us to Coventry, as we wanted to take a look at the controversial new cathedral that is rising adjacent to the old one - reduced to a shell after the incendiary bombings by the Germans during World War II. As we were walking about in the grounds of the old cathedral, we were stopped by one of the architects, who proceeded to give us a highly stimulating lecture about the new building. Then as we were taking some pictures, a little middle-aged man came up to me and asked without any introduction: "Are you a Jew?" After my initial surprise at his form of greeting, I learned during the ensuing conversation that he was a German-Jewish physician who had emigrated to New Zealand during the Hitler regime, and now was in the middle of an 18 month tour of Europe.

After leaving this bustling industrial city, which still shows the scars of its war-time bombings, we drove through Stratford-on Avon and

* An additional 1,300,000 are in Northern Ireland

and the adjacent Shakespeare country to Worcester. Stopping for an hour to look at the impressive cathedral we went on through some of the prettiest parts of England until we reached the border counties and the eastern border of central Wales: a great mass of beautiful mountains, intersected by green and fertile valleys. We drove through a series of towns with unpronouncable names, all seemingly beginning with the double Ll....., and finally to the Welsh resort town of Aberystwyth on the central point of the wide curve of Cardigan Bay on the Western coast of Britain. From there we drove down the coast to Fishguard to make connection with the auto ferry to Rosslare in Ireland.

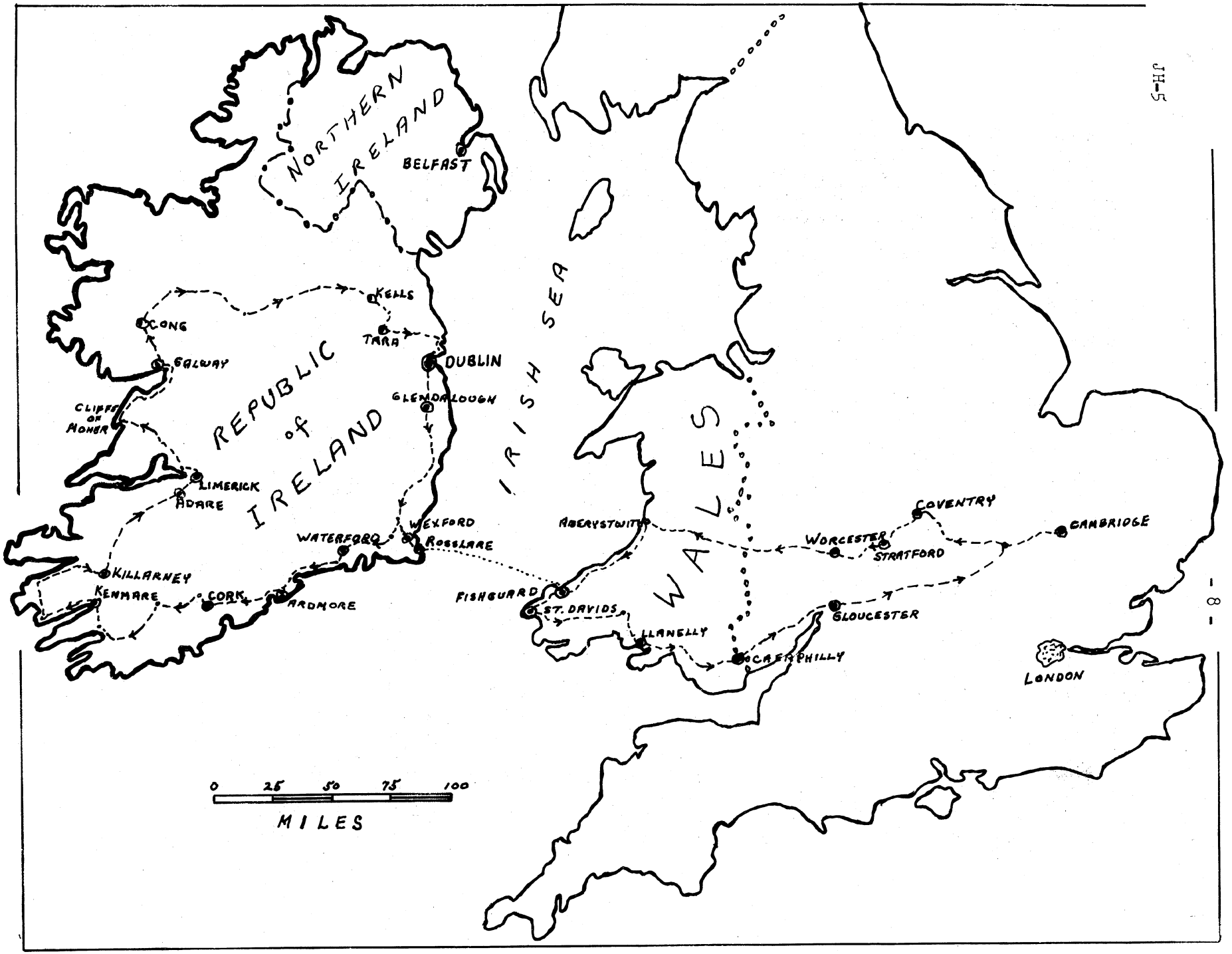
This 60 mile run appears to be a materpiece of inefficiency. For some unexplained reason, this 2½ hour traverse of the Irish Sea is always made at night necessitating much greater cost and complications. Then, there is no way to drive on the ship. One actually drives up and down the railroad platform (about five feet wide). I cannot imagine how an American car could be handled. Then each auto is separately lifted up by a crane and deposited directly into the hold of the ship. One boards at 7 P.M., the ship leaves at 2 A.M. and arrives at 4:30 A.M. and at 5:30 one is wakened for the departure at Rosslare.

This procedure is even more archaic. You drive the auto (after each one has been lifted separately out of the ship by another crane) off the pier into a railroad jetty. Then a little engine pulls a load of about ten cars down the jetty into the harbor, stops, backs into the station, and then the passengers (who have ridden in a little passenger coach behind the engine) get out, and back their cars out and down the ramp. One can imagine the delay when over 50 cars are involved. Customs is practically non-existent (except for a strong interest in fire-arms), and there is no show of passports.

By a lucky coincidence our car was among the first, and we were off to an early start for our first day in Ireland. Rosslare, a pretty seaside, golfing resort, was our introduction. As we sped down the road to Wexford at a fast speed of 35 mph (we were to find that Irish roads, although usually of excellent surface, shared the problems of English roads - extraordinarily curvy and narrow), We noticed that the Irish cottages by the side of the road, although extremely modest, were clean looking and evidently well looked after.

Stopping in Wexford to purchase provisions for our picnic lunch, we continued on to a small village called Taghmon, and ran headlong into our first experience with Irish geniality. We visited a small Protestant church, which has a very interesting 6th century stone cross in the front yard. A middle-aged caretaker appeared and wished us good day. It was soon evident that he was more than delighted to interrupt his leisurely work to show us proudly around his building.

The latter has an ancient Catholic tombstone on the floor. He pointed to a plaque on the wall, which announced that H.F. Lyle, who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LIMERICK
ADARE
WATERFORD
WEXFORD
ROSSLARE
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COVENTRY
CAMBRIDGE
WORCESTER
STRATFORD
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wrote "Abide with Me" had been curate there in 1815 - at the age of 20. Later, in the front yard and back at the cross, we asked him if he would mind having his picture taken. "With me hat on or off" he inquired with a wide grin on his face. With fond farewells we were off.

Our next stop was Waterford (pop. 28,600) first settled by the Norse invaders in the 9th century. They labored for some 300 years building the walls and fortifications around an area of 15 acres. One tower, some 80 feet high, built in 1003 by Reginald the Dane, still stands. It occupies a prominent place in Waterford's legendary history, as it was the site of the marriage of Strongbow (the Anglo-Norman conqueror) to Eva, the daughter of Dermot McMurrough, Irish king of Leinster. Strongbow was the first of the Anglo-Normans to arrive - in 1169; he battered down the walls and carried the city by storm. His victory was celebrated by the marriage.

Inside the tower we met a guide who just wouldn't let go of us until he told us his inexhaustible store of information about the tower and of early Irish history. He evidently has few visitors, and was going to make the most of it. He insisted on reviewing our itinerary, and made several useful suggestions.

After having lunch at the seaside beach of Traymore, we continued on to Ardmore, a charming andvery pretty seaside town. The village (pop. 183) is largely built on a hillside overlooking the sea. At the top of this hill we came across a most interesting group of eccliastical ruins, amidst perhaps the most scenic surroundings in Ireland. There we saw our first "oratory", this one built by St. Declan in the 5th century. These all-stone structures were built, by and for the use of the first missionaries to Ireland, with no mortar. This one is some thirteen feet by nine feet with two and a half feet walls. They were built usually in inaccesible places and the missionaries went out to preach from them. Adjacent to it are the ruins of the 8th century cathedral with 12th century stone carvings representing scriptural scenes, and a "round tower" built in the 9th century for protection against the raiding Vikings. This one, a very perfect specimen, is 96 feet high and one of the last to be built in Ireland - and commands a magnificent view of the ocean.

Cork is the second largest city of Ireland (with a population of only 74,500). St. Finbarr founded his monastary here in the 7th century and it quickly became a wealthy abbey. It was later conquered by the Danes, who built it up to be an important commercial town. The two finest streets, St. Patrick and the Grand Parade, are actually constructed over broad and deep sheets of water on which ships loaded and unloaded in the 18th century.

Here was our first impression of Irish urban life. We had of course been impressed by the brilliant green grass of the "Emerald Isle" (larely a result of the heavy rains - Galway and Kerry average over eighty inches per year), but were unprepared for what appears to be an absolute

obsession by the people for the color green. Green double-decker busses, green storefronts, a veritable sea of green cars (mostly German Volkswagens and English Morris Minors), green skirts, green jackets, ties, etc. etc. ad infinitem. Again, everyone was cheerful, no one minded our double parking, nor wandering about in the middle of streets and sidewalks taking pictures of the passing crowds. We were to find that the same was to be true in all other towns.

As we didn't particularly want to spend the night in a city, we drove on to the village of Blarney, six miles northwest of Cork and set amongst charming wooded scenery. The village, noted for its tweed, is far more widely celebrated for its "Blarney Stone", which forms the sill of one of the projecting parapets of the 15th century castle.

The castle, oneof the strongest and most impregnable in Ireland, has walls 18 feet thick in places. It underwent many sieges and was one of the few that was successfully defended against Cromwell. The only part remaining is a square keep 85 feet high. The castle is still in the hands of the original family, now represented by a Protestant woman who lives with her second husband (the first was divorced - as was happily pointed out to us by the gossipy caretaker) in another and newer castle on the adjacent grounds.

We stayed overnight at a small but clean hotel in the village. Typical of those we were to find, the price was extremely reasonable, twelve shillings sixpence ($1.74) per person for bed and breakfast. The manager turned out to be a loquacious young man, who spun some interesting yarns about Irish folklore.

That evening, after dinner, we took a walk around the village (a ten minute project.) We came upon one couple, out on a date, reading a book together while parked in an auto. Others merely strolled about. There is really nothing to do here, once the bars close (most places about 10:30 P.M.). We managed to get back in time to the hotel for a pint of Guinness. The village crowd was friendly, and all shared in the laughter caused by the bartender who was so old he couldn't read the labels on the bottles!

From Blarney we proceeded westward through Macroon, the Pass of Kelmaneigh in the Shehy Mountains, the lovely villages of Ballylicky and Glengariff and on to Kenmare, where we detoured a bit to have a look at a Neolithic "stone-circle".

Some 13 stones, with diameters averaging perhaps three feet each, were arranged in a circle with a diameter of 60 feet. A much larger stone was placed in the center of the circle. The site was on a small rise overlooking a gurgling stream below. The farmer, on whose land the circle stands, and who charged us each a shilling to hike up to it, told us a little about the Druids who used this circle.

Kenmare is the gateway to what is known in touristese as the "ring of Kerry." The latter is an auto trip on the 86 mile lovely coastal road which traverses the picturesque Iveragh Peninsula in County Kerry.

During the trip one sees magnificent views and we passed several beautiful sandy beaches at the western extremity where we easily could have spent days just loafing around. We had our picnic lunch on a high piece of ground overlooking the ocean several hundred feet below.

On the traverse around the Peninsula, we took a little side expedition through three miles of almost unpassable dirt roads to have a look at Staigue Fort reputed to be the finest example and the best preserved of the Neolithic "ring-forts" in Ireland. The fort stands well back from the path in a little clearing nestled up near the side of a hill, and commands a magnificent view of the ocean approaches many miles below. The fort consists of a circular stone wall, 89 feet in diameter, 13 feet thick at the base and tapering to about 7 feet thick at the top, which is 18 feet above the ground. The whole was built of stones piled one on top the other with no mortar, yet it has remained largely undisturbed for at least 3000 years. As we stood within its wall, it somehow was not difficult to think of those early days, when perhaps hundreds of stone-age people were crowded within waiting for the attack of a marauding party.

Killarney, with a tiny population of 6300, possesses Ireland's world-famous touring and beauty spot, described sometimes as "Heaven's Reflex." Although we found some of the descriptive literature to be a bit superfluous, it must be admitted that Killarney is a lovely spot. On one side are MacGillicuddy's Reeks (2400-2700 feet) described in the guide book as a "great mountain mass - the finest and highest in Ireland." Below are Killarney's lakes "the most celebrated in Ireland."

We proceeded to perform some of the expected tourists' antics; horseback riding through a portion of the four-mile Gap of Dunloe to Black Lough, where according to tradition St. Patrick drowned the last serpent in Ireland. We drove up the hills on the other side of town to a 9th century collection of ruins; castle, round tower, cathedral; which gave a magnificent panoramic view of the lakes and Reeks of Killarney. We took a buggy ride around Muckross Peninsula, a 10,000 acre preserve, which together with Muckross House (a 19th century pile of stone) was presented in 1938 to Ireland in the form of a National Park by an American millionaire, Mr. Bowers Bourn.

From Killarney, where we stayed overnight, we headed straight north to County Limerick. Our first stop was the tiny village Adare. Here we found an ancient castle and a 14th century Franciscan friary in the midst of a beautifully kept nine-hole golf course, all on the estate of the Earl of Dunraven. This golf course is perhaps the most beautiful we had ever seen - with the ivy covered castle and moat at one end and the lovely friary ruins at the other overlooking the fourth green.

The village hugs one of the walls of the estate, and includes some very pretty thatched cottages as well as the Dunraven Arms Hotel, the guests of which are given the privilege of using the golf course.

It was here in lovely Adare that we came across a pitiable sight - a poverty stricken gypsy family in what must have been close to the last extremity. We first noticed five small children, the oldest about 6 or so, sitting around a small open cart (about five feet square with no top) with their father, on the side of the road before a small camp fire. They had some pots and pans, a few tattered rags of clothes on their backs, and a tarpaulin, under which they presumably crawled when it rained. The mother appeared a few minutes later as we drove into the village, carrying a new baby on her back and begging from house to house. They looked like primitive animals - in almost sickening contrast to the well-scrubbed faces we encountered on the Earl's estate.

Limerick (pop. 50,820), an ancient Norse town on the River Shannon was our next large city - and again left a most favorable impression of wide streets, friendly and courteous people, and the color green splattered on every conceivable article. We drove on four miles to Bunratty Castle in Clare County for lunch. This early medieval castle, still inhabited until just a half-century ago, presents an imposing sight with its battlements and extremely thick walls.

We took a little detour to Shannon International Airport, let the wives use a little blarney on the customs people, and were admitted into the world-famous tax-free store. It was indeed tempting, with the best Scotch at $2 per bottle (which, however, could only be flown off the premises), but we were soon off to have a look at the Cliffs of Moher. These magnificent cliffs, rising to a height of over 600 feet, and extending some five miles overlooking the Atlantic, are certainly one of Ireland's major scenic attractions. From the top of the cliffs one looks down a sheer drop into the ocean boiling below and dashing against the cliff face - an awesome view, which we watched lying prone on our stomachs - there is no guard rail.

Then through some wild and almost deserted country to Galway (pop. 21,300), where Columbus, so tradition declares, heard Mass in the Church of St. Nicholas before he started out on his journey. The "Genoa Cafe", a few feet from the present church, commemorates the occasion.

Although late in the day, we again did not wish to stay in a city, so we drove on another hour through what is known as "Joyce's country" to the tiny village of Cong, at which is located not only some interesting ruins, but also Ashford Castle, which is definitely not a ruin.

This castle, built less than 100 years ago, and which belonged for many years to the Guinness family, has been transformed into a modern hotel, which has perhaps one of the most beautiful settings in the world. It has all the accroutements of a castle with turrets, gates, a well-stocked

lake and all the rest. Inside are a series of comfortable lounges and bars. All this for £3 ($8.40) per day per person, all meals included.

Although we didn't sleep at the Castle, we did stay for dinner - and had our first unforgettable taste of "Irish coffee." This delectable concoction is mixed in a glass, somewhat larger that that used for claret and includes the following process: first an ounce of Irish whiskey, then some rich black coffee, one tablespoon of sugar, and lastly heavy cream, which when poured slowly down the side of the glass, will float on top of the coffee due to the denseness of the mixture below it. The resultant taste is magnificent.

The following morning we reluctantly turned east and travelled across the width of Ireland through Claremorris, Roscommon and Longford to Ceanannus Mor (Kells) in County Meath. This, one of the most interesting inland towns of Ireland, is situated in a beautiful wooded district and abounds in historic and prehistoric remains.

In the dawn of Christianity, Cormac Mac Art, when he withdrew from Tara (some 14 miles to the southeast) came here to live in the dun of Ceanannus, which had been a royal residence for many centuries. In 550 King Dermot granted the royal dun to St. Columba for a religious establishment, which subsequently became pre-eminent as a center of christian scholastic activity.

Perhaps the most famous product from Kells during this period is the much renowned "Book of Kells", a precious 7th century heirloom of the Celtic monastery of Kells. It is now preserved in Trinity College Library in Dublin. The churchyard with its group of antiquities includes St. Columba's (or Columbcille's) House, one of the oldest stone "oratories" in Ireland. Built in 814 by monks who came from Iona, it is 23 feet by 21 feet with walls 4 feet thick. It is roofed with stone, the ridge 38 feet above ground. Between the Barrel vault and the roof is a croft divided into three small rooms, which probably formed dormitories for the monks. Although it was Sunday morning, the caretaker was brought to us by three small girls, who stayed with us having the time of their lives. Nearby is a 100-feet high round tower and several stone high crosses with a variety of ornamentation and Latin inscriptions.

We continued on through An Uaimh (Navan) to the Hill of Tara, the site of Ireland's most famous ancient regal palaces. It is situated on a gently sloping hill, in the midst of a most interesting and beautiful countryside, with a 360° view, commanding all approaches as far as the eye can see.

The visitor is quite likely to be somewhat disappointed if he does not realize beforehand what Tara has to show him. Here are no massive ivy-covered buildings picturesque in their decay, but rather a great sense of history long past and buried in time. When Tara (which was first constructed in the first century A.D.) was at the height of its glory

during the 3rd-6th centuries, the buildings were constructed of timber. These disappeared centuries ago. What is left are mounds and earthworks which surrounded the magnificent palaces and halls. The largest of these was Teach Miodchvarta (the Hall of Central Visitation), 795 feet long and 90 feet wide, a great rectangular building erected by King Cormac Mac Art. It was apparently the banqueting hall of the Court, seating some 1000 knights with the high king at the head.

We left Tara in mid-afternoon, and drove through Swords, where, for the first time we ran into traffic. A long procession of autos was winding its way through the village on the main road north from Dublin on this sunny Sunday afternoon. We crossed through the line and after a few miles arrived in Malahide, just six miles from Dublin. Here at the beach and on its adjacent moss-covered hills were large masses of people as far as the eye could reach - like a great colony of ants. Most were merely sunbathing with picnic lunches. Although in some ways it was reminiscent of Coney Island in its heyday, there was not a hot-dog stand in sight - just people.

We stopped long enough to aim the camera, and then continued around the small and more residential bathing area of Howth Peninsula into Dublin proper. This, the capital of the Republic of Ireland, is a bustling and attractive, essentially late Georgian, city of some 522,000 inhabitants, founded in 837 by the Norsemen. It is the only area in the Republic where we noticed some industrial activity.* We drove through the 2000 acre Phoenix Park and along the many picturesque quays bordering the River Liffey which runs right through the center of the city. We spent some time just loafing around O'Connell Bridge, over which people, busses and cars poured in a continuous stream. The northern end emptied into a wide, tree-lined, boulevard which houses most of the large cinemas, travel agencies and posh hotels. The southern end led to the more important area of historical interest and governmental activity. Here are Leinster House (where the Dail or Ireland's Parliament meets), the National Gallery, Museum and Library (all four are in one compact group of buildings) as well as Trinity College and hosts of small but excellent shops selling everything from exquisite ladies' fashions and Irish woolens to African wood carvings.

* The economy of the country is primarily agricultural; the chief products being dairy goods and flax. The only large industrial area on the island is in the northeast (Ulster and the adjoining region in the Republic.)

As the Presidential election* had just been completed, activity at the Dail was very quiet. We passed on into the National Museum, which has on display a wealth of Irish treasures and antiquities - most of it pre-Christian. The most interesting of these are the Bronze Age gold trinkets, a large number of which were found about 80 years ago by a gang of railroad workmen. A little note above the display case quietly informs the reader that only about one quarter of the find (the largest in all of Europe) is available - the remainder, it appears, was taken away by the workmen, melted down and sold!

Trinity College and its Library enjoy a prominent location not far from the Government buildings and across the street from the massive headquarters of the Bank of Ireland. The Library has an important distinction: in 1801 an Act of Parliament extended to it the same right as Cambridge and Oxford to receive a copy of every book published in the United Kingdom. Although it has used this privilege to build up an impressive collection, the major items of interest are some of the medieval manuscripts on display, especially the Book of Kells and the Book of Armagh. Because of its exquisite ornamentation and tracery, its marvelous illuminations, coloring, and wonderful exactness of detail, the Book of Kells is considered by prominent authorities as "the most beautiful book in the world." It is a Latin copy (in beautiful Gaelic script) of the Gospels.

* Seventy-six year old Eamon de Valera who, on 17 June, resigned from his office of Prime Minister, was elected as the third President of Ireland in the recent election. He received some 538,000 votes, a majority of 120,000 over his only opponent, General Sean Mac Eoin.

De Valera had also arranged to have the voters choose between proportional representation, which is the way in which their parliamentary elections are conducted, and a constitutional amendment which would institute the British system of single-member constituencies. This desire of de Valera was defeated by 322,000 to 295,000.

The election of de Valera, who symbolizes Irish republicanism to the outside world and whose prestige within the Twenty-Six Counties eclipses that of any other politician, was a foregone conclusion.

Nevertheless, he is not quite the father figure he is sometimes assumed to be. In the course of his long, stormy, and tactically agile public life, he has made and kept many public enemies.

The election itself was rather unexciting, with an apathetic electorate - fewer than 60% voted. We noticed very few posters, and the people we talked to generally seemed to feel that it would be fitting that de Valera should move on and up into the ceremonial eminence of the Presidency.

Before we left Dublin, we gave ouselves the pleasure of having a charcoal-broiled steak dinner. The Dolphin Hotel, a rather oldish structure in an out-of-the-way street, is practically indistinquishable from the other buildings in the block. Yet, inside we had the best meal since we had arrived in the British Isles (or have we forgotten the standards in the best American restaurants?) With french fried onion rings, a delectable steak and watercress salad and followed up by Irish coffee, we were ready to leave Ireland with nothing but pleasant memories.

Next morning we left early travelling through the desolate and mutilated Wicklow Mountains bordering the southern reaches of metropolitan Dublin. These mountains (all less than 2000 feet) present a most dismal sight - they have been denuded for countless centuries of the peat covering them. As far as the eye can see, there are long cuts in the surface, now partly grown over with a kind of scrub, where peat has been stripped away - layer by layer. We had seen peat bogs all over Ireland, but never anything like this.

Our only stop on this last lap back to the ferry at Rosslare was at the Vale of Glendalough in County Wicklow. This lonely, but extremely picturesque valley is one of the beauty spots of the Island. St. Kevin came here early in the 6th century to live as a hermit - first in a tree, then in a cave. As his reputation and number of followers grew, a small stone "oratory" (known as St. Kevin's House) was built to serve as a place of worship. This was the origin of his monastary, which lasted for over 600 years. The present group of ruins include the oratory (intact), a fine example of a round tower (103 feet), a 7th century cathedral and a very early granite cross some 11 feet high. All are in a beautiful setting surrounded by hills lavishly decorated in green.

Our return trip to Cambridge, through southern Wales, took us first to St. Davids, the smallest cathedral city in the British Isles, then through the very pleasant and peaceful town of Llanelly (pronounced something like "Thlan - ethly"), to Caerphilly Castle, the second largest in the world (after Windsor Castle in England). An idea of the strength of this vast, thirteenth century Edwardian fortress may be gained from the fact that Cromwell failed in his attempt to blow it up; and Cromwell, if he proved nothing else, proved that there were few things from cathedrals to constitutions that he could not wreck.

We then drove through the intensely industrialized southeastern district of Wales. Although we avoided all the larger cities of Swansea, Cardiff, and Newport, the roads are just a succession of towns with belching furnaces and heaps of coal slag. A recent novel, entitled "Rape of the Fair Country" by Alexander Cordell, which I had just finished, vividly portrays the violent effects of the industrial revolution of the early 1800's on the Welsh peoples of this area.

We passed into England via Monmouthshire and the Forest of Dean, through Ross-on-Wye and Symond's Yat, two beauty spots, finally stopping at Gloucester with its magnificent perpendicular 14th century cathedral. This cathedral is also famous for the tomb it contains of the unfortunate King Edward II, who was murdered in 1327, at the age of 20, by his wife, Isabella, by the insertion of a red-hot iron into his bowels, a form of killing that was popular at the time as it left no noticeable scars!

The Cotswolds lay before us, a land of gently rolling hills and pleasant little villages made of the locally quarried honey-colored stone and built in the Tudor period. The villages are as enchanting as their names - Moreton-on-Marsh, Stow-on-the Wold, Chipping Camden, and so on.

Yours sincerely,

John Hanessian, Jr.

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