

A German tourist on a recent holiday in Ireland had brought with him a book, *Reisebilder aus Grossbritannien und Irland* [Pictures from a Tour of Great Britain and Ireland] by F. Hobirk, published Detmold, 1865, and took mischievous delight in teasing his local guide and preparing his fellow-tourists for their visit to Limerick by reading aloud the Limerick extract, which I have translated below:

We stopped at the railway station in Limerick and everyone prepared to alight. I mounted a car and trundled towards the city. The impression that the traveller receives is not comforting. The eye must become accustomed, the more one proceeds westwards, to the inhospitable bleakness, the cold monotony of life. The houses become meaner looking, the streets quieter. The people themselves appear more grave, and in the depths of their dark eyes appears an old inborn sorrow. The section of the city which opens before the railway station has indeed an English appearance, but only insofar as the names and facades are English. The inside is melancholy and desolate, and knows nothing of the fullness and pleasure of English life.

So I came to my hotel, and it was truly a colossus of a building, with the name emblazoned in gold letters on its wide brow: Cruise's Royal Hotel. The regal splendour, however, dwindled considerably as soon as I set foot in the entrance hall and ascended the labyrinth of steps. Everything was arranged as badly as possible, inconvenient, unfriendly, and confoundedly uncomfortable. The total indifference and lack of interest in everything which would make one's visit not merely tolerable, but even agreeable, met the guest at every turn and exerted a depressing effect.

I therefore betook myself immediately outdoors, and my first destination was the Cathedral of St. Mary. It lies in a quiet yard, surrounded with rustling groups of dark, ancient trees. It is now used exclusively for Anglican-Protestant worship.

A GERMAN TOURIST'S IMPRESSIONS OF LIMERICK 1865

BY LARRY WALSH

The ground on which it stands once bore the castle of Donald O'Brien, king of Limerick, who granted it to the church, and the building of the cathedral began about the year 1180. It was completed only in the 13th century. Its architecture illustrates the transitional style between the Irish round arch and the Norman quadrangular, and is possibly more bulky than any of the type I have seen before; but its mass and the weight of the construction, its age and the hoary moss-covered walls produce a stark melancholy impression which is not lessened by the irregularity of the whole. Here we have a quadrangular window, there a pointed-arch doorway, sometimes a rosette of wonderful delicacy and graceful perfection surprises us, and defiantly at the corner stands the dark rectangular Norman tower, whose battlements the clouds and the ravens envelop.

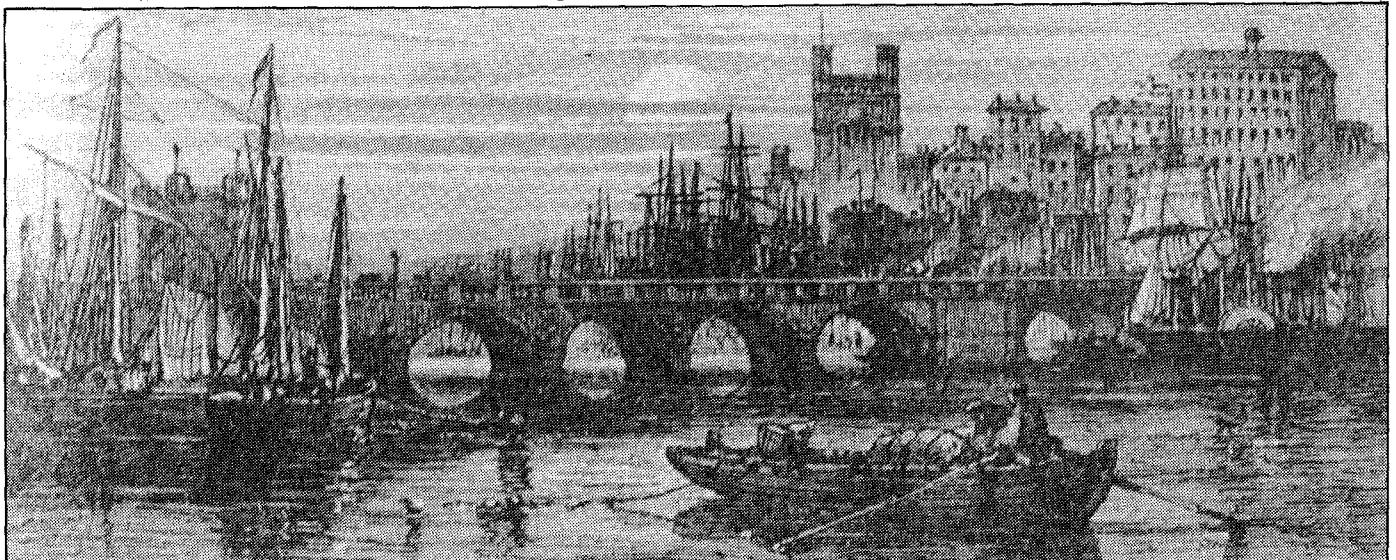
Divine service was being celebrated in the cathedral. The sound of the organ welcomed me, and the little daughter of the tower-warden climbed aloft with me. The organ music filled the whole building up to where the fresh air of the heavens streamed in, carrying the dissipating sounds without. But it remained melodious, and unbound the soul of he who ascended, inviting him to look about in serenity.

The black-haired child soon left me; she said she would wait for me in the bell tower, while I should climb to the top. I climbed; I left old broken steps behind me; a spiral stairway, more fragmentary

the higher I went, was scaled, and lastly a wooden ladder. Now I was at the top. Below me the fading organ and choir music; below me the bells; and through the mossy cracked crenellations of the tower I looked down on the trees of the churchyard, on the streets of the New Town and the market full of people, on the bridges and the vehicles on them, on the Shannon and the many stone dams over which it foams and rushes on. Behind, I looked down on the old town with its dark maze of houses, its smoking chimneys and the smog and haze that settle over the whole, and ships which now, at low tide, lay dry on the sand at the quays.

Then I went to a different embrasure. Now I saw cottage walls eaten away through poverty and misery; roofless cottage rooms, splitting walls, amongst them houses and smoking chimneys, and behind them a different aspect of the Shannon, which here winds more tranquil through meadows and country houses and meads and chains of blue hills, which, lying together in a ring round the whole, seem to enclose all. Every embrasure presented a new prospect, and the misery of the city and the autumn showers in the broad meadows beyond cried out to me, as the steady roar of the Shannon from the depths and the strong wind from dark clouds met one another. Thus I gained an unconfined overview of the layout and construction of the city.

Limerick lies on the Shannon, which



Limerick, 1865, from "Reisebilder aus Grossbritannien und Irland". Limerick Museum.



Postcard of the Cornmarket, c. 1900. Limerick Museum.

separates the large provinces of Leinster and Connaught, and joins the large lakes of central Ireland to the Atlantic Ocean, to which it flows in a wide estuary. Limerick lies at the point where the estuary begins to open towards the sea; the largest ships can sail right up to its stone quays. Limerick lies in one of numerous harbours of the west coast of Ireland which are sheltered by nature from all the dangers and accidents of the seas, and yet enjoy all those advantages of their immediate surroundings which only partially and with difficulty can be provided by artifice.

The harbour of Limerick is quiet, and so also are the other harbours. But the time will come when the joyful clamour of international commerce will fill the bays of Ireland, when the pennants of all nations will flutter around its coastal promontories.

The Shannon, the king of Irish rivers, flows majestically by the city, and one of its arms, the Salmon River, divides it into two still sharply separated parts, Irishtown and Englishstown. I have never seen two opposites more sharply contrasted. What I saw of Englishstown was not very inspiring; it differed, however, from that which I had yet to see as day differs from night. The total demoralisation, the total filth, the total decay of Irish existence I could survey at one glance. It was Sunday afternoon and Irishtown was full of the market bustle of the common people. The main and commercial streets of the same Irishtown Ward, full of people and small shops, at once assailed my senses with the wild clamour and indescribable stench characteristic of gross poverty. The houses here are musty caverns, their ground floors storehouses full of nauseating foods. Herring barrels, overflowing with filthy brine, are placed before the doorways; mouldy hams lie spread out on benches, greasy bowls of

calf entrails and animal feet placed beside them, mildewed hare-skins and goose-wings hanging all about. Donkey carts block the streets, and half-naked people surround them. The ground floors of almost all the houses have ragdealers within – every third house is inhabited by a pawnbroker. And what sort of goods does one see here! Coats whose arms barely hang by a thread, uniforms which veritable generations of soldiers seem to have worn, boots without soles and such like. And then the customers who buy these goods: men with battered hats and ragged coats, women with never-washed faces and never-combed hair. The streets teem with frightful creatures; the whole wretchedness of humanity assembled in its most horrifying aspect, made even more dreadful by the filth and every imaginable sign of neglect which it bears.

So I came to the Haymarket, a marketplace which forms the boundary between Irishtown and the old Englishstown. The English settlers had a passion for ornamenting the mud cottages and the impracticable streets of Ireland with beloved names from home. But where are the splendid house-fronts of Haymarket Hill in London? Where the stately portals and colonnades? Where the worldly turmoil, so splendid, so respectable by day, so intoxicating by night? Nought of all these – a large desolate courtyard, surrounded on four sides by a wooden roof on wooden pillars. The Glory of Ireland rests on wooden pillars, their bases, in the boggy ground, already rotten through. In the whole place there was almost nothing to be seen but old clothes hung up for sale, swinging in the wind; in front, in the quadrangle, was the principal commercial article – buttermilk, brought here in large pails on donkey-carts, and drunk by the thirsty populace from large tin bowls. Old Englishstown (for there is also a new Englishstown –

Newtown Pery, in which the polite society of Limerick lives in handsome uniform houses) appears not much better than Irishtown. Here again is a whole street full of rag dealers, and in the cellars the same stench, the same tumult of dirty people and dirty goods. Even on the quays, which here extend along the Salmon River and the Shannon, the fresh air from the water and the not-too-distant ocean cannot totally overcome the miserable foul air. I saw nothing of "the old majestic houses with gabled roofs" which Macaulay describes so beautifully. On the contrary, with the sole exception of George Street, I have not seen in the square mile of Limerick any house in which the roof was not holed, or the door smashed, or at least one window pane splintered. I recall going through a large house, of which only the walls stood, the window openings were recognisable and some shreds of wallpaper hung on the walls. And not only here, but even in Newtown Pery, the pride of Limerick, I saw whole rows of ruins; even in the middle of the Shannon itself, where it flows at its widest, with nowhere a way, footpath or bridge to be seen, stand two large dilapidated houses, without roof or window. Whence these alarming masses of ragdealers on every street, of roofless ruins in the midst of the current of life? I don't know. It is as if the people in Ireland build "ruins" where we build houses; and instead of clothes bring rags and mould to the market.

I then walked by the light of the gas-lamps along the promenade of Limerick, George Street, and sought out the "Royal Hotel", in which, by this time, I intended to rest a while.

FOOTNOTE

I wish to thank Lenore Fischer, tour guide, for acquiring the original text for Limerick Museum, and for proofreading and advising on the translation.