

Travellers' Impressions: Castleconnell and Killaloe, 1914

I have already spoken of the wonders of the River Shannon, which rises in a bubbling cauldron away above Lough Allen, and flows down through ten counties to the sea; widening into lakes twenty miles long, or draining vast stretches of impassable bog; navigable for more than two hundred miles; and, finally, the great barrier between eastern Ireland, which the Danes and English over-ran and conquered, and western Ireland, which has never ceased to be Irish, and where the old Gaelic is still the language of the people.

The most beautiful portion of the river lies between Lough Derg, at whose lower end stands the ancient town of Killaloe, and Limerick, which marks the limit of the tideway. In this twenty-mile stretch, the river, for the first and last time in its course, is crowded in between high hills, and runs swift and deep and strong. It was this stretch we started out from Limerick,

by *Burton C. Stevenson*

that day, to explore, and our first stopping-place was Castleconnell, about halfway to Killaloe. We found it a perfect gem of a town, situated most romantically on the left bank of the river, and with one of the nicest, cleanest, most satisfactory little inns I have ever seen. It reminded us of our inn at Killarney, for it was a rambling, two-storied structure, and the resort of fishermen. Castleconnell, as the guide-book puts it, is the Utopia of Irish anglers. I can well believe it, for the salmon we saw caught at Killarney were mere babies beside the ones which are captured here.

We made straight for the river as soon as we had divested ourselves of our luggage, down along the winding village street, past the ruins of the castle which was once the seat of the O'Briens, kings of Thomond, and which Ginkle blew up

during the siege of Limerick, thinking it too dangerous a neighbour; and then we turned upstream, close beside the water's edge, for two or three miles. The exquisite beauty of every vista lured us on and on – the wide, rushing river, with its wooded banks, broken here and there by green lawns and white villas, lovely, restful-looking homes, whose owners must find life a succession of pleasant days. For this portion of the valley of the Shannon seems to me one of the real garden spots of the world.

The river was in flood, and so not at its best for fishing, but nevertheless we passed many anglers patiently whipping the water in the hope that, by some accident, a passing fish might see the fly and take it. And at last we came to the end of the river road – a place called "World's End," where we had expected to get tea. But the refreshment booth was closed and there was no sign of anyone in the neighbourhood.

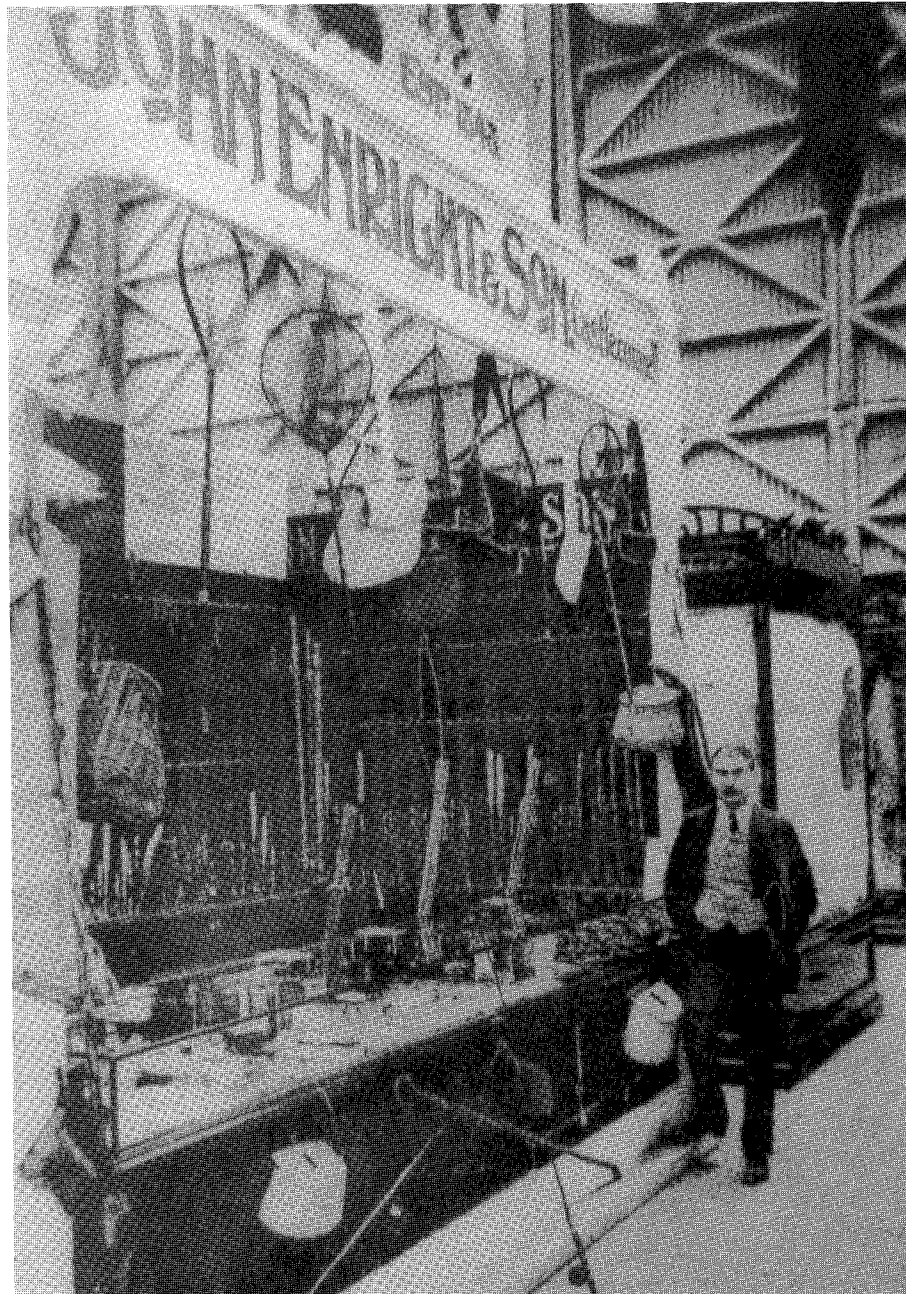


High water at Doonass c.1895. Limerick Field Club photo

(Limerick Museum)



Advertisement for Enright's fishing tackle c.1890 (Limerick Museum)



Exhibition stand of Enright & Son c.1900 (Limerick Museum)

We were very hungry therefore, when we got back to our inn, and our high tea tasted very good indeed, served in the pleasantest of dining rooms, on a table with snowy linen and polished dishes and shining silver, and by a waiter who knew his business so well that I judged him to be French. What a pleasure that meal was, after the slovenly service of the house at Limerick, most of whose customers were commercial travellers! Irish commercial travellers, I judge, are the least fastidious of men!

Just across the street from the inn at Castleconnell is the place where the famous Enright rods are made, and after tea we went over to take a look at them. I know nothing about rods, but anyone could appreciate the beauties of the masterpieces which the man in charge showed us. And then he asked us if we wouldn't like to try one of them, and insisted on lending us his own - hurrying home after it, and stringing on the line and tying on the flies, and pressing it into my hand in a very fever of good-nature. I confess I shrank from taking it. I had a vision of some mighty fish gobbling down the fly and dashing off with a jerk that would crumple up the rod in my hands, and I tried to decline it. But he wouldn't hear of it - besides, there was Betty, her eyes shining at the prospect of fishing in the Shannon.

So I took the rod at last, and we went down to the river again, and worked our way slowly down stream, along a path ablaze with primroses, and cast from place to place for an hour or more. There were many others doing the same thing, and they all seemed to think that the fish would be sure to rise as the twilight deepened. But they didn't, and I saw no fish caught that day. This didn't in the least interfere with anyone's pleasure, for your true angler delights quite as much in the mere act of fishing as in actually catching fish. But it was with a sigh of relief I finally returned the rod intact to its owner. He said that I was welcome to it any time I wanted it, but I did not ask for it again.

There were five or six fishermen staying at the hotel, and they came in one by one, empty-handed. They had had no luck that day - the water was too high; but it was already falling, and they were looking forward to great sport on the morrow.

That morrow was a memorable one for us, also. It was a perfect day, and we set out, as soon as we had breakfasted, for the falls of Doonas and St. Senan's well, one of the most famous of the holy wells of Ireland. To get to it, it was necessary to cross the river, and the only way to get across is by a ferry, which consists of a flat-bottomed skiff, propelled by a man armed only with a small paddle. As I looked from the paddle to the mighty sweep of the river, rushing headlong past, I had some misgivings, but we clambered aboard, and the boatman pushed off.

He headed almost directly upstream, and then, when the current caught us,



The Ferry, Castleconnell c.1900, proof for a William Ritchie & Sons postcard

(Limerick Museum)

managed by vigorous and skilful paddling to hold his boat diagonally against it, so that it swept us swiftly over toward the other bank, and we touched it exactly opposite our point of departure. It was an exhibition of skill which I shall not soon forget.

We stepped ashore upon a beautiful meadow rolling up to a stately, wide-flung mansion, and turned our faces down the river. Already the fishermen were abroad, some of them casting from the bank, but the most out in midstream, in flat-bottomed boats like the one we had crossed in, which two men with paddles held steady in some miraculous way against the stream. One was at the bow and the other at the stem, and they did not seem to be paddling very hard, but the boat swung slowly and steadily back and forth above any spot which looked promising, no matter how swift the current.

It grew swifter with every moment, for we were approaching the rapids, and at last we came out on a bluff overhanging them. Above the rapids, the river flows in a broad stream forty feet deep, but here it is broken into great flurries and whirlpools by the rocky bed, which rises in dark irregular masses above its surface, and the roar and the dash and the white foam and flying spray are very picturesque. For nearly a mile the tumult continues, and then the stream quiets down again and sweeps on toward Limerick and the sea.

We followed close beside it to a little inn called the "Angler's Rest," set back at the edge of a pretty garden, entered through a gate with three steps, on which were graven the words of the old Irish greeting, "Cead Mile Failte," a hundred thousand welcomes. We sat down for a time at the margin of the river and watched the changing water, and then set off to find St. Senan's well.

There are really two wells. The first is

in a graveyard, a few rods away, where a fragment of an old church is still standing. It is a tangled and neglected place, with the headstones tumbled every way, and bushes and weeds running riot, but the path that leads to the well shows evidence of frequent use. The well itself is merely a small hollow in an outcropping of rock - a shallow basin, about a foot in diameter, but, always miraculously full of water. I don't know how the water gets into it, or whether it is true that the basin is always full, but it certainly was that day; and the legend is that whoever bathes his forehead in that water will never again be

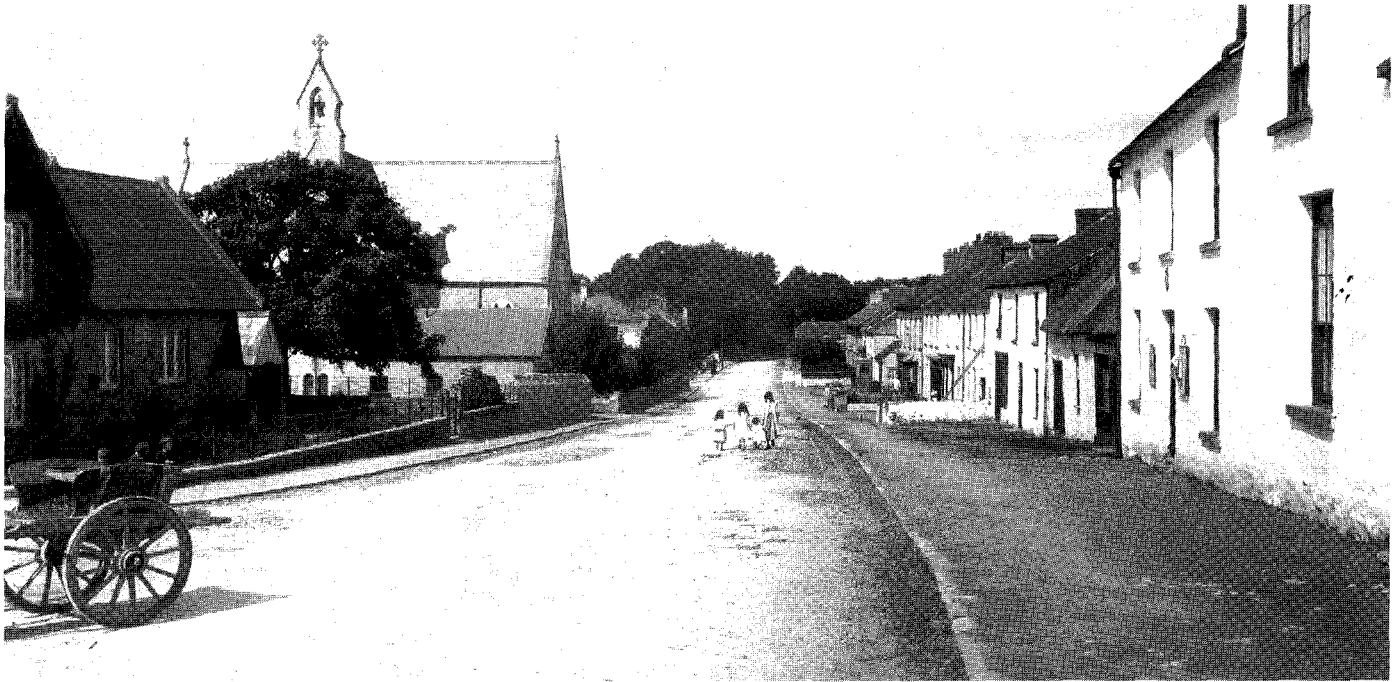
troubled with headache, provided that he does it reverently, with full belief, and with the proper prayers. The well is shadowed by a tall hawthorn bush, and this bush is hung thick with cheap rosaries and rags and hairpins and bits of string and other tokens placed there by the true believers who had tested the wonderful properties of the water. We tested them, too, of course, and added our tokens to the rest.

The principal well is a little farther up the road, set back in a circle of trees and approached by a short avenue of lindens. It is a far more important well than the other - is one of the most famous in



St. Senan's Well at Doonass Demesne

(Photo by the author)



Main Street, Castleconnell c.1900, proof for a William Ritchie & Sons postcard

(Limerick Museum)

Ireland, indeed - and is covered with a little shrine. The shrine is hung with rosaries and crowded with figurines and pictures of the Virgin and of various saints, among which, I suppose, the learned in such matters might have picked out Saint Senan, who blessed this well and gave it its miraculous power. The trees which encircle the glade in which the well stands are also hung with offerings - sacred pictures, rosaries, small vessels of gilt, and the crutches of those who came lame and halting and went away cured. On either side of the entrance is a bench where one may sit while saying one's prayers, and in front of the shrine is a shallow basin, some two feet wide and a yard long, into which the water from the well trickles, and where one may sit and wash all infirmities away. The water is held to be especially efficacious in curing rheumatism and hip disease and diseases of the joints; and I only hope the cripples who left their crutches behind them never had need of them again.

This whole valley of the Shannon, from Killaloe to the sea, is dominated by the patron of this well, St. Senan, a holy man who died in 544, and whose life resembled that of St. Kevin, whom we have already encountered at Glendalough. Like Kevin, Senan was persecuted by the ladies, who, in all ages, have taken a peculiar delight in pursuing holy men, and he was finally driven to take refuge on a little island at the mouth of the Shannon, Scattery Island, where he hoped to be left in peace. But he was destined to disappointment, for a lady named Cannera, since sainted, followed him and asked permission to remain. This scene, of course, appealed to Tom Moore, and he enshrined it in a poem, of which this is the final stanza:

The Lady's prayer Senanus spurned;
The winds blew fresh, the bark returned;

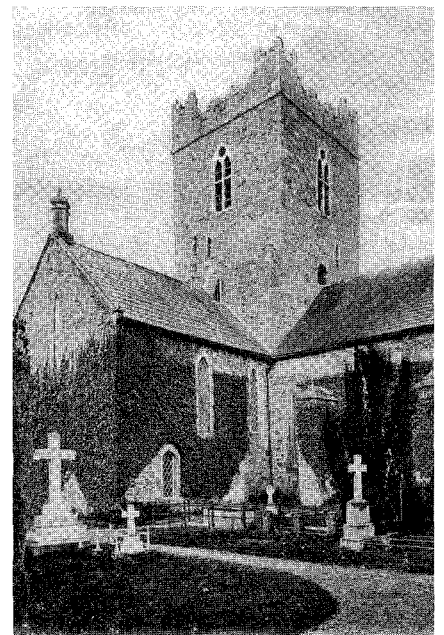
But legends hint that had the maid
Till morning's light delayed,
And given the Saint one rosy smile,
She ne'er had left his lonely isle.

I do not know upon what evidence Moore bases this slander of a holy man; but, at any rate, he stayed on his island, and built a monastery and collection of little churches there for the use of the disciples who soon gathered about him, and their ruins, which much resemble those at Glendalough, even to a tall round tower, may be seen to this day. Some antiquarians hold that St. Senan is merely a personification of the Shannon; but I don't see how a personification could build a collection of churches. It is more satisfactory, anyway, to think of him as a person who once existed, and lived a picturesque life, and built churches and blessed holy wells, and died at a ripe age in the odour of sanctity.

We sat for a long time before his shrine, looking at the tokens and the crutches, and wishing we had been there the day they were abandoned. To be made whole by faith is a wonderful thing, whatever form the faith may take, and I should like to have seen the faces of the cripples as they felt the miracle working within them, here in this obscure place. Unlettered they no doubt were, unable to read or write perhaps, believing this flat and stable earth the centre about which the universe revolves; but they touched heights that day which such sophisticated and cynically sceptical persons as you and I can never reach.

We left the shrine, at last, and made our way back to the river, and up along it, past the rapids, to the ferry. The ferryman was watching for us, and had us back on the Castleconnell side in short order. He evidently considered the sixpence I gave him a munificent reward for the double trip.

When we got back up into the village, we found it in the throes of a great excitement over the arrival of three itinerant musicians, two of whom played cornets, while the third banged with little sticks upon a stringed instrument suspended in front of him. The cornetists paused from time to time, to make short excursions, cap in hand, in search of pennies, but the third man never stopped, but kept playing away all up the street and out of sight. We came across them again when we walked over to the station to take the train for Killaloe; but I judge their harvest was a slender one, for the people who hung out of gates and over doors to listen to the music, disappeared promptly whenever the collectors started on their rounds.



St. Flannan's Cathedral, Killaloe.
Wrench Series postcard,
posted in 1906

(Limerick Museum)

We had a little while to wait at the station, and I got into talk with the signalman, who told me he had a brother, a Jesuit priest, in Maryland, and who wanted to hear about America, whither he hoped to be able to come some day. That it would be at best a far-off day I judged from the wistful way in which he said it.

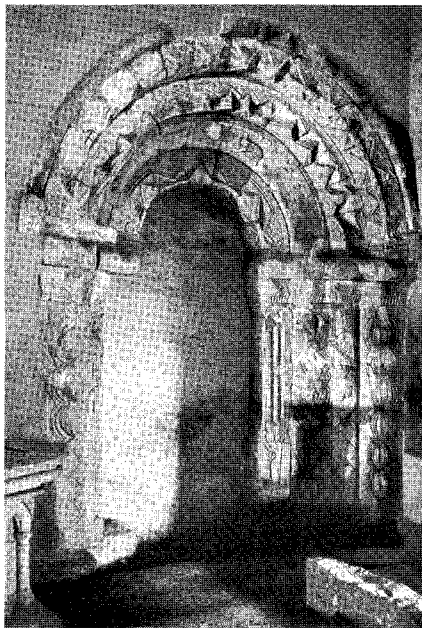
And then he saw that I was interested in the signal system by which the trains on his little branch were managed, and he explained it to me. For each section of the road there is a hollow iron tube, some two feet long, with brass rings around it, called a staff. The engine-driver brings one of these staffs in with him, and this must be deposited in an automatic device in the signal-house and another received from the signalman before the train can proceed. When the staff is deposited in the machine, it automatically signals the next station and releases the staff in the machine there, ready to be given to the engineer of the approaching train. No staff, once placed in the machine, can be got out again until it is released in this way, and as no train can leave a station until its engineer has received the staff, it is practically impossible for two trains to be on the same section of road at the same time. The system is rather slow, but it is sure; and being automatic, it leaves nothing to chance, or to the vagaries of either engineer or signalman.

The bell rang, signalling the approach of our train, the signalman carefully closed the gates across the highway which ran past the station, and a crowd of men and boys collected, to whom the arrival of the train was the most important and interesting event of the day; and then it puffed slowly in, and we climbed aboard. Killaloe is only ten miles or so from Castleconnell, but we had to change at a station called Bird Hill; and then the line ran close beside the Shannon, with lofty hills crowding down upon it, and at last we saw the beautiful bridge which spans the river, and beyond it the spires and roofs of the little town.

Not unless one knows one's Irish history will one realise what a wonderful place Killaloe is; for Killaloe is none other than Kincora, a word to stir Irish hearts, the stronghold of the greatest of Irish kings, Brian Boru. When that great chieftain fell at Clontarf, MacLiag, his minstrel, wrote a lament for him in the old Gaelic, and James Clarence Mangan has rendered it into an English version, of which this is the first stanza:

O, where, Kincora, is Brian the Great?
And where is the beauty that once was thine?
O, where are the princes and nobles that sate
At the feast in thy halls, and drank the red wine?
Where, O, Kincora?

It was by no mere chance that Kincora, the seat of the Kings of Thomond, was situated just here, for it was this point which controlled the valley of the lower



Romanesque doorway in St. Flannan's Cathedral c.1910
(Limerick Museum)

Shannon. Limerick marks the head of the tideway navigable from the sea, then come fifteen miles of rushing torrent, of fall and rapid, which no boat can pass; and then comes the long stretch of placid lake and river over which boats may go as far as the ford of Athlone, and farther. Between Athlone and the sea, there was just one ford - a treacherous and hidden one, it is true, possible only to those who knew every step of it, but still a ford - and it was here, a little above the present town of Killaloe, where Lough Derg begins to narrow between the hills.

Brian was born here in 941. Twenty years before, the Danes had sailed in force up the Shannon and fortified the island at the head of the tideway which is now the oldest part of Limerick. They set themselves to ravage the wide and fertile valley, to sack the shrines of the churches, to exact tribute from every chieftain - nay, from every family. MacLiag, Brian's bard, author of that old epic, *The Wars of the Gael with the Gall*, another Homer almost, who told the story of Danish oppression down to their final defeat at Clontarf, thus described the burden under which, in those days, the people of Ireland groaned:

"Such was the oppressiveness of the tribute and the rent of the foreigners over all Erin, that there was a king from them over every territory, a chief over every chieftaincy, an abbot over every church, a steward over every village, and a soldier in every house, so that no man of Erin had power to give even the milk of his cow, nor as much as the clutch of eggs of one hen, in succour or in kindness to an aged man, or to a friend, but was forced to keep them for the foreign steward or bailiff or soldier. And though there were but one milk-giving cow in the house, she durst not be milked for an infant of one night, nor for a sick person, but must be kept for the foreigner; and however long he might be absent from the house, his share or his supply durst not be lessened."

Brian had an elder brother, Mahon, who was king of South Munster, and dwelt at Cashel, and the two did what they could against the invaders, killing them off "in twos and in threes, in fives and in scores"; but always fresh hordes poured in, and at last Mahon grew disheartened at the seemingly endless struggle against these stark, mail-clad warriors; while as for Brian, his force was reduced to a mere tattered handful, hiding in the hills. Then it was that he and Mahon met to discuss the future.

"But where hast thou left thy followers?" Mahon asked, looking at the men, only a score in number, standing behind their chief.

"I have left them," answered Brian, "on the field of battle."

"Ah," said Mahon, sadly. "Is it so? You see how little we can do against these foreigners."

"Little as it is," said Brian, "it is better than peace."

"But it is folly to keep on fighting," said Mahon. "We can not conquer these shining warriors, clad in their polished corselets. The part of wisdom is to make terms with them, and leave no more of our men dead upon the field."

"It is natural for men to die," answered Brian calmly; "but it is neither the nature nor the inheritance of the Dalcassians to submit to injury and outrage. And yet I have no wish to lead any unwilling man to battle. Let the question of war or peace be left to the whole clan."

So it was done, and "the voice of hundreds as of one man answered for war."

Mahon abode loyally by this decision, and there was a great muster, and a fierce battle near the spot where Limerick Junction now stands, and the Danes were routed, "and fled to the ditches, and to the valleys, and to the solitudes of that great sweet-flowery plain," and the Irish pursued them all through the night, and with the morning, came to Limerick, and stormed and took the island fortress; plundered it, and reduced it "to a cloud of smoke and red fire afterwards."

Then Mahon was murdered by some such treachery as stains so many pages of Irish history, and Brian became king of all Munster. His first work was to punish his brother's murderers, which he did with grim celerity, so that, as the chronicler puts it, they soon found that he "was not a stone in place of an egg, nor a wisp in place of a club, but a hero in place of a hero, and valour in place of valour." After that, with new energy, he turned against the Danes, and harried them and was himself harried, defeated them and was himself defeated, but fought on undaunted year after year, until the final great victory at Clontarf, where he himself was slain. And during all the years that he was king of Munster, he ruled it, not from Cashel, but from Kincora, his well-beloved castle here at the ford of the Shannon.

The ford is no longer there, for an elaborate system of sluice-gates and weirs has been constructed to hold the water

back and regulate the supply to the lower reaches of the river, and one crosses to the town upon a beautiful stone bridge of thirteen arches, between which the water swirls and eddies, forming deep pools, where great salmon love to lurk. At its other end is the town, with its houses mounting the steep slope from the river, and dominated by the square tower of its old cathedral.

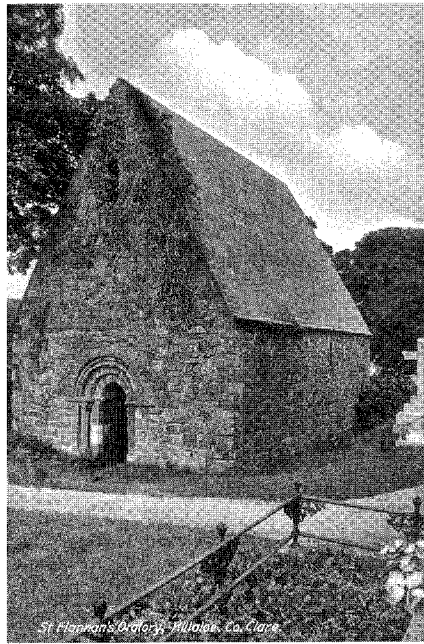
It was to the cathedral we went first, and a venerable pile we found it, dating from the twelfth century, and attributed to that same Donall O'Brien, King of Munster, who built the one at Limerick. But, alas, it is venerable only from without; as one steps through the doorway, all illusion of age vanishes, for the interior has been "improved" to suit the needs of a small Church of Ireland congregation.

The Protestants in this parish are so few that the choir of the cathedral is more than ample for them; so it has been closed off from the rest of the church by a glass screen with hideous wooden "tracery" - there is a rose window (think of it!) sawed out of boards; and beyond this screen an ugly pavement of black and yellow tiles has been laid over the beautiful grey flags of the old pavement, and pews have been installed. One of the transepts is used as a robing-room; in the other an elaborate combination of steam-engine, dynamo and storage-batteries has been placed to furnish heat and light - and this, mind you, in the church which was once the royal burying-place of the Kings of Munster!

It seems foolish to maintain a great church like this for the use of so small a congregation as worships here, and yet the same thing is done all over Ireland, though it would seem to be only common sense to give the big churches to the big congregations, and to provide small churches for the small ones. But I suppose no one in Ireland would dare make such a suggestion.

I am surprised that the energetic vicar of this parish has not decided that the church is too dark and hired some workmen to knock out the lancet windows. These windows are one of its chief beauties, they are so tall, so narrow, so deeply splayed - the very earliest form, before the builders gathered courage to cut any but the smallest openings in their walls. And in the wall of the nave, blocked up and with use unexplained, is a magnificent Irish-Romanesque doorway. Tradition has it that it was the entrance to the tomb of King Murtough O'Brien, and its date is placed at the beginning of the twelfth century. The man who built it was an artist, for nothing could be more graceful than its four semi-circular arches, rising one beyond the other and covered with ornamentation - spiral and leaf work, grotesque animals with tails twined into the hair of human heads, flowers and lozenges, and the familiar dog-tooth pattern, of which the Irish were so fond.

Interesting as the church is, or would be but for the "improvements," it is far outranked by a tiny stone structure just outside - the parish church of Brian Boru



St. Flannan's Oratory c.1910
(Limerick Museum)

himself. It is less than thirty feet long, and the walls are nearly four feet thick, and the two narrow windows which light it, one on either side, are loopholes rather than windows; and the doorway by which it is entered, narrower at the top than at the bottom, is a veritable gem; and the high-pitched roof of fitted blocks of stone is twice as high as the walls; - and on the stone slabs of its pavement Brian Boru was wont to kneel in prayer, five centuries before Columbus sailed out of Palos

Of course I wanted a picture of this shrine; but there were difficulties, for it stands in a little depression which conceals part of it, and the high wall around the churchyard prevented my getting far enough away to get all of the high-pitched roof on the film. The caretaker, who was most interested in my manoeuvres, brought a ladder at last, and I mounted to the top of the wall, and took the picture but, even then, I didn't get it all.

The graveyard about these churches is a large one, but it is crowded with tombs; and the north half of it is mown and orderly, and the south half is almost impenetrable because of the rank and matted grass and weeds and nettles. This is the result of an old quarrel, more foolish than most. For, like Ireland itself, this graveyard is divided between Protestants and Catholics, the Protestants to the north and the Catholics to the south of the church; and the Protestants consider their duty done when they have cared for the graves in their own half; while the Catholics hold that, since the Protestants claim the cathedral, they are bound to look after its precincts; and the result is that the visitor to those precincts is half the time floundering knee-deep in weeds.

The most interesting tomb in the place is in the midst of this tangle, therefore a Catholic's. It bears the date 1719, and is most elaborately decorated with carved figures - one kneeling above the legend. "This is the way to Bliss"; another, a man

with crossed arms, inquiring, "What am I? What is man?" - two questions which have posed the greatest of philosophers. One panel bears this sestet:

How sweetly rest Christ's saints in love
That in his presence bee.
My dearest friends with Christ above
Thim wil I go and see
And all my friends in Christ below
Will post soon after me.

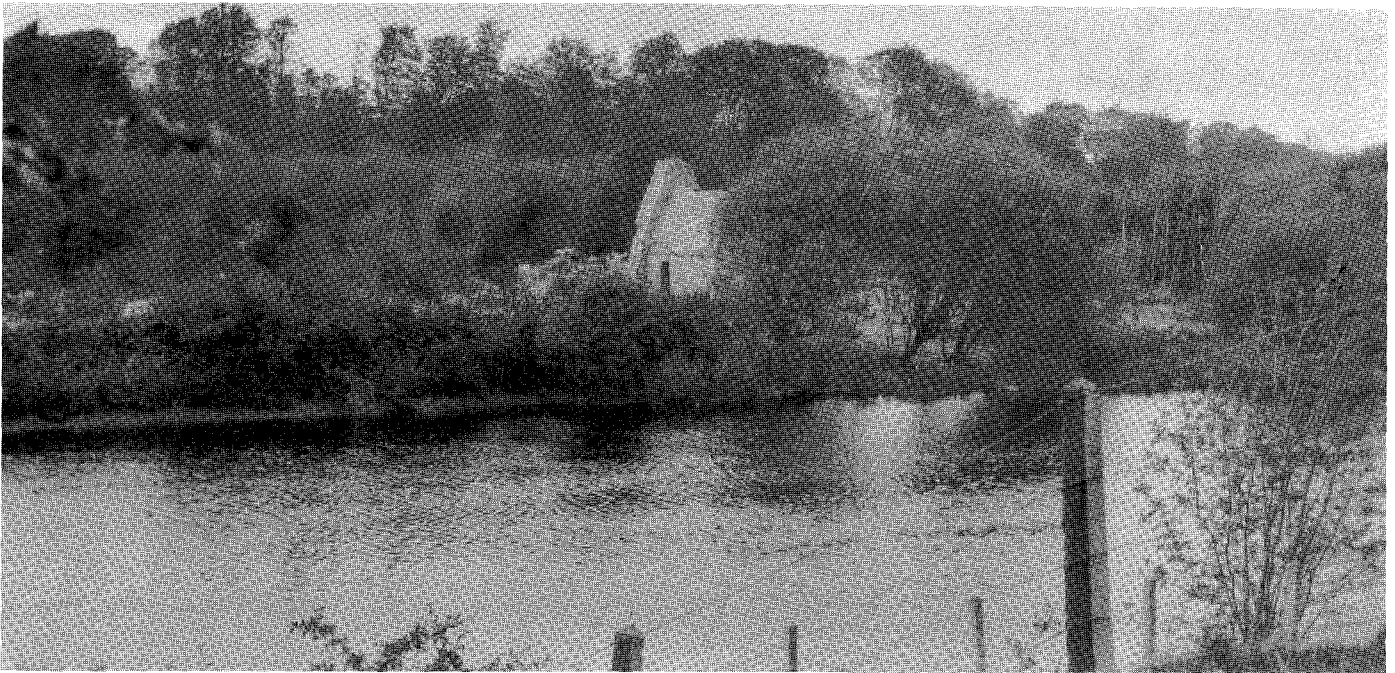
We left the place, at last, and walked on along the street, peeping in between the bars of an iron gate at the beautiful grounds of the Bishop's palace; and then up a steep and narrow lane to the little plateau which is now the town's market-place, but where, in the old days, Brian's palace of Kincora stood. Not a stone is left of that palace now, for the wild men of Connaught swept down from the mountains, in the twelfth century, while the English were trying to hold the castle and so control the destinies of Clare, and drove the intruders out, and tore the castle stone from stone, and threw timber and stone alike into the Shannon. Just beyond the square stands the Catholic church - a barn-like modern structure, hastily thrown together to shelter the swarming congregation, for which the cathedral would be none too large.

We went on down the hill, past the canal, with the roaring river beyond, and the purple vistas of Lough Derg opening between the hills in the distance, along an avenue of noble trees, and there before us lay a great double rath, sloping steeply to the river, built here to guard the ford. The ford lies there before it - a ford no longer, since the sluices back up the water; but in the old days this was the key to County Clare, this was the path taken by the men of Connaught in raid and foray; and here it was that Sarsfield, with four hundred men, followed Hogan the rapparee, on that night expedition which resulted in the destruction of the English ammunition-train. Aubrey de Vere has told the story in a spirited little poem, beginning,

Sarsfield went out the Dutch to rout,
And to take and break their cannon;
To Mass went he at half past three,
And at four he crossed the Shannon.

We had hoped to go to Athlone by way of Lough Derg, but we had already learned that that was not to be, for we had been told, back at the bridge, that the passenger service across the lake would not start until the sixteenth of June. And we were sorry, for, from the summit of this old rath, the lake, stretching away into the misty distance, looked very beautiful and inviting.

We made our way back to the village and stopped in at a nice little hotel just below the bridge, and had tea, served most appetizingly by a clean, bright-eyed maid; and then, while Betty sat down to rest, I sallied forth to see, if possible, the greatest curiosity of all about Killaloe - the original church or oratory of St. Molua, on



St. Molua's Church on Friar's Island before its removal to the grounds of the Catholic Church in Killaloe in 1929

(Limerick Museum)

an island near the left bank of the Shannon, about half a mile downstream.

Now to get back to St. Molua, one has to go a long way indeed, for he died three hundred years before Brian Boru was born. He was the first bishop of Killaloe, which is named after him, "cill" meaning church, and Killaloe being merely a contraction of Cill Molua, the church of Molua. The little oratory on the island, to which he retired for contemplation, after the manner of Irish saints, was built not later than the year 600.

You will understand, therefore, why I was so eager to see it, and I went into the bar to consult with the barmaid as to the best manner of getting to it. I had been told that it was possible to reach it from the left bank of the river without the aid of a boat, but the maid assured me this could be done only when the river was low, and was out of the question in the present stage of the water. So she went to the door and called to a passing boatman, and explained my wishes, and he at once volunteered to ferry me over to the island. His house, he said, was just opposite the island, and his boat was tied up at the landing there; so we walked down to it, along the bank of the canal which parallels the river.

A little way down the canal was a mill, and a boat was tied up in front of it unloading some grain, and when I looked into the boat, I saw that the grain was shelled Indian corn! It was not from America, however, but from Russia, and my companion told me that quite a demand for cornmeal was growing up in the neighbourhood, and that it was used mixed with flour. And then he listened, his eyes round with wonder, while I told him how corn grows. He had never seen it on the ear, and did not know the meaning of the word "cob," except as applied to a horse.

"And of course you have seen bananas

growing!" he said, when I had finished, and I think he scarcely believed me when I tried to explain that a country warm enough for corn might still be too cold for bananas.

We finally reached his house - a little hovel built on a bluff overhanging the river - and went down some rude stone steps to the water's edge; and he unchained his boat, and whistled to his dog, and pushed off. It was quite an exciting paddle, for the current was very swift; but we got across to the island at last, after some hair-raising scrapings against rocks and over submerged reefs. We found the island a tangle of weeds and briars, but we broke our way through, and after some searching, found the tiny church, almost hidden by the bushes about it. They were so thick that I found it quite impossible to get a picture of the whole church, but by breaking down some of them, I finally managed to get a picture of the narrow inclined doorway, with my guide's dog posing on the threshold.

The oratory is built solidly of stone, with walls three feet thick, and a steep stone roof. Its inside measurements are ten feet by six! There is a single window with a round head cut out of a block of stone, and in the wall on either side just below it is a shallow recess. The ceiling has fallen in, but one can still see the holes in the walls where the supporting beams rested. Above it, under the steep roof, was a croft, where perhaps the saint slept.

Consider, for a moment, what was going on in the world when this little church was built. It takes us back to the age of legend - the age of King Arthur and his knights - to that dim period when the Saxons were conquering England, and the Frankish kingdom was falling to pieces, and Mohammed was preaching his gospel in Arabia. A century and a half would elapse before Charlemagne was born, and two centuries before the first Norse boat,

driving westward before the tempest, touched the New England coast!

There is, of course, a holy well on the island - the one at which St. Molua drank; and we found it after a long search, but the river was so high that it was under two or three feet of water. There were some rags and other tokens hanging on the neighbouring bushes, but not many, and I judge that few people ever come to this historic spot.

At last I was ready to go, and we climbed into the boat and started for the mainland; and once I thought we were surely going to capsize, for the boat got out of control and banged into a rock; but we finally stemmed the current, and the boatman dropped his paddle and snatched up a pole, and pushed along so close to the shore that the overhanging branches slapped us in the face, and the dog, thinking we were going to land, made a wild leap for the bank, fell short, and nearly drowned.

When we were safe again at the landing-place, and the boat tied up, I asked my companion how much I owed him for his trouble.

"Not a penny, sir," he said, warmly. "Its glad I am to oblige a pleasant gentleman like yourself."

"Oh, but look here," I protested, "that won't do," and I fished through my pockets and was appalled to find that I had only nine-pence in change. "Wait till we get back to the hotel," I said, "and I'll get some money."

"What is that you have in your hand, sir?"

"Oh, that's only nine-pence."

"That would be far too much, sir," he said; and when I hesitatingly gave it to him, he as hesitatingly took it, and I really believe he was in earnest in thinking it too much.

On our way back to the town, he expounded to me his theory of life, which



Cottage opposite Friar's Island, Killaloe

(Photo by the author)

was to give faithful service to one's employer, and help one's fellow-men when possible, and never bother unduly about the future, which was never as black as it looked. And I agreed with him that trouble always came butt-end first, and that, after it had passed, it frequently dwindled to a pinpoint - the which has been said in verse somewhere, by Sam Walter Foss I think, but I can't put my hand on it.

We got back to Castleconnell just as

the fishermen were coming in, and it was far from empty-handed they were this time. The array of salmon stretched out on the floor of the bar, when they had all arrived, was a very noble one. And everybody stood around and looked at them proudly, and told of the enormous flies that had been used, and how one monster had whipped the boat around and towed it right down through the rapids, and lucky it was that the water was high or it would

infallibly have been ripped to pieces, but the boatmen kept their heads and managed to get it through, and when the salmon came out in the quiet river below and found itself still fast, it gave up and let itself be gaffed without any further fuss.

And again after dinner, we saw the familiar sight of the catch being wrapped in straw to be sent by parcel post back to England, as proof of the anglers' prowess; and I can guess how those battles on Shannon water were fought over again when the angler got back to the bosom of his family. As for me, I have only to close my eyes to see again that noble stream sweeping along between its green, flower-sprinkled banks, foaming over the weirs, brawling past the rapids, hurrying between the quays of Limerick, and widening into the great estuary where it meets the sea.

Into the West, where, o'er the wide
Atlantic,
The lights of sunset gleam,
From its high sources in the heart of
Erin
Flows the great stream.

Yet back in stormy cloud or viewless
vapour
The wandering waters come,
And faithfully across the trackless
heaven
Find their old home.

(From *The Charm of Ireland* by Burton E. Stevenson, John Murray, London, 1915).

Two opinions of Limerick

By chance these two short but contrasting opinions of Limerick were encountered on the same day. The first is from "Green & Silver," a description of a canal tour of Ireland undertaken by L.T.C. Rolt and his wife, which was first published in 1949. The trip to Limerick was by bus from Killaloe. They did not wish to come any further down river by boat because the high banked Head Race offered no scenic views. The second is much earlier and is taken from "Dyott's Diary 1781-1845" edited by Reginald Jefferey and published in 1907. In August 1781 Staffordshire born William Dyott joined the 4th Regiment of Foot as an ensign. At the time the Regiment was based in Ireland and in late December 1782 he, now a lieutenant, and the regiment passed through Limerick on the way to witness the execution of deserters in Cork. In early January the following year the regiment returned to Limerick where it stayed for about 7 weeks before marching off to Enniskillen. The excerpt given below is the only entry for his time in Limerick.

by Brian Hodgkinson

"There are two Limericks. The traveller passing through the town in course of a journey as we had done on our arrival sees the spacious Georgian city of O'Connell Street and its neighbours, streets which boast of many houses that rival those of the Dublin squares in their elegant proportions and beautiful doorways. But on this occasion we were able to go further afield, and thus we saw Limerick of the slums. After that, even O'Connell Street seemed to have changed for the worse. Our perspective of the city had altered, and Georgian Limerick now resembled a thin fancy crust on a very unsavoury pie. There may be slums as bad or worse in Dublin, but if there are we did not see them even though we did penetrate into some mean quarters of that city. It is only fair to add that we saw evidence that much slum clearance work has already been done in Limerick, and doubtless much more would have been accomplished had it not been for the "emergency". In this matter of slum clearance, Ireland would

seem to be about a quarter of a century behind England, for I have childhood recollections of slums in our cities as bad as those in Limerick today".

"Sunday February 23rd (1783)

Morning packing up, paid visits and dined with T. Grady, S. Grady, and mess at Knight's. In the evening went to take my last leave of my dear Susey. The parting was as dismal as I ever experienced, but true lovers must part sometimes. I stayed at Mrs Ross's till two o'clock; and on Monday the 24th February we marched about eleven o'clock from that dear place Limerick, a town that I shall ever hold in my highest esteem, and where I received more civility than ever I experienced. It is without doubt the best quarter in the world. I was told by several people that there never was more real grief shown by the inhabitants of Limerick to a regiment leaving it than to ours. The concourse of the people in the streets as we marched through was immense. We arrived about three o'clock at a small town called Newport, nine miles from Limerick. Tom & Hardy Grady accompanied us to that place, but we were not at all in spirits".