THE SUN shone warm and kind as I boarded a bus for Limerick. We drove through a pleasant green country of small farms, the driver negotiating with easy skill the zigzag road. Delectable blue mountains came presently into view, and vanished again. We passed over brown trout streams and through sleepy towns. One feature of the landscape struck me forcibly—a passion for strong gate-posts, which must, I imagine, have their origin back in Ireland's stormy past.

The tiniest cottage with a thatch, a box of geraniums in the window and a fuchsia-edged pathway, will sport a pair of massive stone posts anything from two to five feet in diameter. The gate may be of the filmsiest, or even be non-existent, but not to keep up a pair of splendid portals would evidently mean a fall in dignity. I was reminded of the Essex farm moats which are said to refer back to the age when the wolf still rampaged in England.

A few scattered villas and a brand-new all-electricity house warned me we were approaching Limerick. Past some dull terraces, and suddenly we seemed back in the eighteenth century. Only the raw bricks of a Jesuit college warned me that the Crescent we were now entering was the same that I should not be seeing patch and powder on the footway. Down the long continuous thoroughfare of O'Connell Street, Patrick and Rutland Streets to Charlotte Quay we went, between rows of lovely Georgian houses of dark-red brick, built apparently to one pattern. Even the porticos are uniform. A pair of Ionic pillars above a stately flight of stone steps supported the fanlight, and along the windows with their twelve or sixteen panes remain intact. But the houses themselves are sadly ravaged, glass out of a fanlight here, a broken step there. And when we reached Charlotte Quay, I was appalled by the squalor. Swarms of ragged children ran in and out the great doors, for these palatial houses now have become a hive of tenement houses occupied by the poorest of the poor.

Round the corner are the Old Custom House with its river-side garden, and other quays, their tall houses all showing the same sad face. And past them flows the strong tide of the Shannon from which the Atlantic breezes blow, fresh and cleansing.

As a child I had spent a day in Limerick driving round on a car, and had lingered to stay on and taste the full flavour of its charm. So now I rejoiced to be here again, and to lean over the parapet of Sarsfield Bridge, looking out to Thomond's seven stone arches and King John's Castle. That massive keep, and the battlemented tower of St. Mary's Cathedral, gleaming in the sunshine, seemed to be mocking the eight centuries that have not availed to break their strength or turn them into ruins. The climate here deals kindly with the native limestone. As a child I had spent a day in Limerick driving round on a car, and had lingered to stay on and taste the full flavour of its charm. So now I rejoiced to be here again, and to lean over the parapet of Sarsfield Bridge, looking out to Thomond's seven stone arches and King John's Castle. That massive keep, and the battlemented tower of St. Mary's Cathedral, gleaming in the sunshine, seemed to be mocking the eight centuries that have not availed to break their strength or turn them into ruins. The climate here deals kindly with the native limestone. The climate here deals kindly with the native limestone. The climate here deals kindly with the native limestone.

In the evening I walked beside Abbey River, past Sir Harry's Mall, where my quest drew its first blank. The tall houses were all gone, and only imagination could call back my father sailing boats long years ago in one of the great cellars.

Beyond on the King's Island, hundreds of trim white houses were rising, some already occupied by former tenement dwellers from the crumbling Georgian quays; a fine scheme, but it seems only the years will make it popular. The fanlighted staircase leading to single immense rooms and Adam fireplaces are the familiar hallmark that the shawled women still mourn when dispensing with the house-breaker of modern progress...

Next morning I was wakened by a strangely familiar yet long-forgotten sound, which resolved itself into that of many hoofs and rumbling wheels. The street below was alive with horse and donkey traffic. Shawled women and small boys drove scarlet donkey-vans, each carrying a can or two of milk to the creamery. There were larger carts bringing in wood and vegetables from the country and drawn by fine thick-set cobs. Four muns bowled past in a smart governess cart, chattering gaily, one of them handling the reins in masterly fashion. Jaunting-cars were bringing farmers' wives in their best clothes into town for shopping. There was even a mysterious contraption, which revealed itself to my astonished gaze as a hoary landau, with its decaying upholstery planked over, doing valiant service as carrier's van.

I plunged into this jolly scene to wander round the town, and then to look for the key of St. John's Parish Churchyard. That, after scouring the town, I eventually did retrieve the key of St. Munchin's was to be expected; and that when I did find the right key, I had to get the boys of the neighbourhood to wrestle with it before I got in, was also just as natural. I eventually searched the St. John's registers in a third church with a genial dignitary who would have worn gaiters in Engand, but was here trousered and entirely approachable and helpful, despite the humble nature of my search for information. He even thanked me for making him go through the records so thoroughly, and with few exceptions kept more than a trilling donation to the church funds.

And in those records we certainly came on sidelights on the practical value of respectability in centuries past. There was entry after entry of 'soldier's child', 'a poor woman's child': no name vouchsafed to those luckless little passengers who had been so unwelcome or passed so swiftly from a hard world. It was good to come out into the light again, and move on to the more robust company of the Freeman's Rolls at the Town Hall.

I quickly found all I was likely to find in Limerick by now, but I still carried on my researches in a spirit of pure adventure, largely because half the town was now also sharing my quest as they passed me hand to hand.

It was: 'And now you would need to meet So-and-so, he lives at 23, but it is next to 26 in that street'; or 'Mr. A. will be your man unless you was to go and see his brother-in-law that was once churchwarden.' And I would go to 23 and find that it was next to 26 and not 26, and that the former churchwarden's gardener was as anxious to help as ever the brother-in-law could be, even suggesting that I should interrupt a tennis match to get hold of the churchwarden.

One day I wandered into the Chamber of Commerce, intrigued by the date of 1809 over its door. Commerce seemed to have deserted it. I passed through a quiet stone-paved hall to find a wonderful upper room with a glorious Britannia carved on its brass and marble mantel, facing a unique eighteenth-century bookcase which must have been designed and built for the room. And through the window I saw an old stone pigeon-cote gracing the high garden wall. Once it held pigeons, trained to carry messages from the merchants living in their country houses in the days before the telegraph came. As I focused my camera on it the representative of Commerce at last found me. Far from resenting my intrusion, he helped to steady the camera and then spent half an hour searching the great bookcase for an old diary that might interest me. He did not find it, but then he so well might have, for he pointed out an ancient petition and
fading charms alive. I demurred at parting with my
trophy to this expert, so another kind friend gave me a
letter to his friend—Wille So-and-so—who would cer-
tainly send me a whole green rose-tree from his garden
just for the asking. To all of them the flower was a topic
pressed between the leaves of a book, and perhaps I may
is the gulf that separates the

Roselawn, from which my father and his youthful friends
had sallied out long ago to fish for salmon to the music of
Handel. It was still standing, battered and neglected, its
garden overgrown with weeds; a ghost of a vanished way
of life. The village of Castleconnell is also a shadow of
past glories, for the Shannon Power Scheme has diverted
much water from the famous salmon leap, and no longer
do fishermen from all over the world come here 'to finish
their education'. But a fifty-four pound salmon still gazes
stolidly out of the window at Enright's, and tales, round
of that master of his craft; how he would place a box of
cigarettes on the lawn and pick out one with every cast of
his salmon line; how he would entertain distinguished
company of a Sunday, saying, 'Give us a song, Johnny!'
and John McCormack would sing the long afternoon
through.

Those grand days are over but Castleconnell is still a
pleasant, whitewashed village where the eel-nets still
provide some occupation. And as always, there were new
friends waiting and tea in a cottage, with slices off a
wheel loaf baked in a pot over a turf fire; tales, too, of the
baking of great numbers of such loaves and the boiling of
scores of eggs as provender, in the old days, when some
sad emigrant was to sail to America in the steerage.

Memory is a strange long thing in Ireland; for, after
tea my host borrowed a bicycle for me and took me off
to interview old Micky whose memory could perform
great feats, for he promptly pointed out to me the great
grandchildren of an old dame who had given my father
rudimentary schooling in 1830—the year the cholera
raged in Limerick.

Old Micky was another pathetic survival, living alone
in one of the ruinous lodges of Mount Shannon, yet
grateful for even such a parlous shelter on the edge of a
scene of devastation where was once unbridled luxury.
His mind ran chiefly on the heroic sportsmen of bygone
days. 'Did ye ever hear tell of the Major?' he would ex-
claim, 'him that was lame and went to hunt on a lame
horse and came in at the death?' A chuckle, and he would
break into another tale of a one-armed sportsman who
would shoot along his left arm, bringing down the birds as
fast as his loader could hand him his guns. That passion
for sport, even if vicarious, appeared not too bad a solace
for a very dim evening of life; and Micky seemed mar-
vellously contented with his lot. He and a few other squatters in the great range of stone
stables and farm buildings were the strange heirs of the
magnificent demesne of John Fitzgibbon, Lord Clare,
once Lord Chancellor of Ireland, who entertained his
friends right royally in the fine rooms which in that sad
blackened ruin stand open to the sky today. We stood un-
der it, my friend, a learned builder, talking of the ways of
eighteenth-century building, and picking up fragments of
stucco mouldings from the rank grass, to show how
strangely those classical architects could put it side by
side with genuine stone.

Building is a craft that leads a man into fascinating
bypaths of knowledge, and, as we walked along a great
stone wall, he pointed out the amazing skill of those old
masons who could form straight courses from stones of
most varying size. He told me that it is a skill not yet
dead in County Limerick and he took out his foot-rule to
measure slates in a yard square, leaning against the wall,
and described the quarries of Killaloe from which they
were hewn, and the slabs that lie in the bed of the river,all
of even thickness, ready to fish out for tombstones.

We ended up in the Protestant church at Kilmurry,
where we saw some of these, curiously sculptured in
comparatively recent times with the symbols of Passion
and the Five Wounds. I have known many good builders
and rare fellows but this Irishman was of the best. No
wonder that in his village they called him the man who
knows everything from the Flood.

On my last day in Limerick I lunched with a grand old
couple, both in their nineties. We sat on a terrace, gay
with hollyhocks, looking over a beautiful view of the river
and the distant spires of the town, while they told me
stories of 'the trouble'. They had lived in a state of siege
here for a week at the time, sharing their stories with
poorer neighbours. The old lady had had to surrender her
son's motor cycle at pistol-point at fortune of a late arm.
She chuckled as she recounted the polite and safe return of
the machine on another dark night, and recalled a
mysterious whisper dropped by a shawled woman in a
shop later—'Did ye get the bike back all right?'—to
which a nod could be the only response.