Motive in visiting Limerick was primarily to find out what I could about my great-grandmother, Lady Louisa FitzGibbon, the last member of my family to own Mount Shannon House and, I gather, a remarkable woman in her own right. What I knew of her before my arrival in Limerick was slight: she was the daughter of the third and last Earl of Clare: her brother, Viscount FitzGibbon, was missing presumed killed in the notorious charge of the Light Brigade at Balaklava: she therefore inherited Mount Shannon and her husband took her name, as is not uncommon in Ireland when property is involved: she spent a great deal of money, was forced to sell Mount Shannon, after her first husband's death married a Sicilian nobleman, and finally died and was buried in a convent on the Isle of Wight. She had left Ireland in 1887.

I arrived in Limerick by bus and went at once to what had been described to me as a charming, old-fashioned and comfortable hotel. My informant was well out of date. The charm and the comfort had been very thoroughly torn away, to be replaced by fake marble, neon strips and some sort of machinery in the walls, an air-conditioning unit perhaps, which hummed insidiously, a malignant irritant. These improvements had been carried out in order that American visitors, held up overnight at Shannon airport, might feel thoroughly at home during their brief stay. The architect or decorator or whatever he is called must have cherished some curious ideas about American homes. The transients, standing about in hopeless knots or sitting in the ugly armchairs and gazing ahead of them with the blank and bovine expression which is common to all stranded travellers, certainly looked anything but happy among all this bleak and shoddy modernity. I moved my bags to the Royal George Hotel which has not been improved and where all is as it should be. I then set forth to explore Limerick.

The atmosphere of Limerick, on this warm evening, was surprisingly different from what I had expected. O'Connell Street, the main thoroughfare and shopping centre, was humming with activity. There seemed to be a purposefulness, a determination, in the people I passed which contrasted strikingly with the apparent lethargy of Cork, a city I had left that morning. Such impressions are misleading, perhaps, but in this case I think they were correct. Limerick, Ireland's third city if you don't count Belfast, is growing fast. The airport and the big hydro-electric installation that they call the Shannon scheme have brought it considerable prosperity, and industrially it is also expanding. The Limerickman is proud of his city and wishes to make it into a great industrial and communications centre. There seems no reason why he should not do so, particularly if present political tendencies continue and the Atlantic community assumes greater reality, for Limerick is geographically well suited to be the hub of an air network linking the Old World to the New. A tremendous expansion in the next few decades seems not at all unlikely. There are fortunes to be made in Limerick and no doubt the Limerickmen will make them for they are, I am told, very hard-headed businessmen.

O'Connell Street, at its top end a dignified and Georgian sort of place, degenerates into a mass of untidy shops of the chain store variety before petering out near the bridge that leads to the old town, or English Town as it is called, though there is little English about it any more. Here the at-
The sphere is very different, aged and peaceful. King John's great cathedral, with its satisfactory round towers, stands on the left bank of the Shannon. Behind it is St. Mary's spherical church.

I visited this fine cathedral in the company of the sexton, a cheery old man who took a pleasant and unostentatious pride in his church, as well he might. It was built in the twelfth century and the extensive alterations at that time have done little to alter its early medieval character. It is high and airy and without much stained glass. Some people, of whom I am one, do not care for the dull glow of stained glass which cramps and darkens the interiors of churches and does not permit architecture to soar as it should. I had fought in England's wars, and on the walls were monuments to various Protestant gentlemen and ladies of the vicinity. For St. Mary's is a Protestant church, as indeed are almost all the old churches in this country. Taken over by the established Church of Ireland, they have never been restored to their original owners. (Indeed how could they be without a tremendous row? The Church of Ireland maintains that it is not that in name only.)

It is perhaps this fact which gives the old Irish churches an air of emptiness, almost of desiccation, since there are far more Protestant churches than are needed. The Catholic ones, almost all built in the last hundred and fifty years and in many cases of a tawdry ugliness that recalls the nonconformist temples of the Welsh, are packed every Sunday, while the little Protestant congregations seem lost among the vastness of a church such as St. Mary's here or St. Nicholas' in Galway. When Gladstone disestablished the Church of Ireland some eighty years ago he saw to it that a handsome compensation was paid and it is from the remnants of this sum that the Irish Church draws a large amount of its income. It is a faith that is here moribund in an alien climate, but it must be given credit for the excellent care that it devotes to the preservation of its old, almost fossilized, buildings. The Roman Catholics in Ireland seem less interested in ancient beauty. As has been frequently pointed out, there is a strong degree of puritanism in Irish Catholicism and beauty is not an automatic virtue as it is about the Mediterranean. A friend of mine remarked to me that whereas in England puritanism led to a schism within the Protestant Church, in Ireland it simply merged with the Catholic Church and gave the Irishman that attitude towards his faith which is so strikingly at variance with the Catholicism of Italy or France or even of Spain.

It is as well not to discuss such matters in Ireland, since one can easily find oneself in deep, if not in hot, water. Particularly is it wise to keep off the subject of religion. In Limerick, it seems, a discussion of dogma can degenerate into a rumpus almost as easily as in Belfast. Whether this is a malicious slander or not I cannot say, for I did not discuss such matters, but certainly the Limerickman is a violent sort of fellow, as was proved during the Anglo-Irish war. And certainly that violence still lingers on. I was told a story of an Englishman who last year was in conversation with an Irish acquaintance in these parts. The Englishman, it seems, was one of those fatuous, red-faced, military men with loud and braying voices and an acute insensibility to the fact that they are not invariably taken at their own valuation when abroad. The Irishman was a softly spoken gentleman who had played a fairly conspicuous part in the Irish Republican Army and whose brother was shot by the British during the troubles. The Englishman, slapping his acquaintance on the shoulder, had asked loudly and cheerfully:

"Do you get any decent rough shooting up around Castleconnell?"

The Irishman replied with a smile:

"Well, thirty years ago, anyone who looked like you in or about Castleconnell was shot on sight."

From St. Mary's I walked along the bank of the Shannon past the fine and delicate eighteenth-century customs house to Sarsfield Bridge. Sarsfield is the great name in Limerick, and rightly so, for his defence of the city in 1691 was one of the few glorious exploits of Irish arms in all those long and tragic wars. It is a curious fact that the Irish should, in general, have fought so badly in Spain...
badly in Ireland. Tom Moore it was who remarked that the Irish can neither fight nor write in their own country and the constant jibes of cowardice levelled against the Irish soldiers, not only by their English enemies but also by their Spanish and French allies, seem to have had a certain basis; at least they showed a repeated tendency to panic. This is all the more curious when one recalls the extreme valour and military talent displayed by Irish troops in the French, Russian, Spanish and Austrian service during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and in the British and American armies during the nineteenth and twentieth. Perhaps the explanation is to be found in the genius of the place, in the peasant’s universal tradition of gentleness until he is driven into furious acts of savage and therefore unmilitary rebellion. Or perhaps, which seems more likely, it is that the Irish armies which fought in the Elizabethan, Cromwellian and Williamite wars were almost always composed of troops who were at the best only half trained. It was the poet Spenser who remarked, during the Elizabethan war: ‘I have heard some great warriors say that in all the services which they have seen abroad in foreign countries, they never saw a man more comely man than the Irishman... When he cometh to experience of service abroad, or is put to a piece or a pike, he maketh as worthy a soldier as any nation he meeteth with’. Certainly Sarsfield’s men who fought here in the last scene of this three-act tragedy were the Irish army that gave the finest account of itself; they had been in the field for some months and were, moreover, stiffened by a number of Irish troops who had been fully trained in the French service and commanded by officers who had learned their trade in the wars of Louis XIV.

Sarsfield himself was a dashing and attractive man and if the story of his remark at the time of surrender - ‘Swap kings and we’ll fight you again’ - is apocryphal, it is well found. It is bitterly ironical that this honourable surrender on honourable terms should have led to one of the great betrayals. A few minutes’ walk from Sarsfield Bridge is the stone on which the Treaty of Limerick was signed, a treaty which promised the Irish at least a measure of religious toleration and the right to retain their property. But no sooner had Sarsfield and Dillon and O’Brien sailed away to France with the fifteen thousand men who preferred service in the French army to defeat at home than the carpet-baggers moved in. The politicians disowned the treaty which the soldiers had signed - much to the annoyance, incidentally, of King William and his better advisers. The Penal Laws against Catholics were passed, every English adventurer who could pull a string began to steal Irish lands, and the possibility of a just settlement in Ireland was once again postponed for a hundred years. These embers are perhaps long cold. But it should not be a source of surprise to the English refugees from their own austerity to find that in Ireland, as in some other parts of the globe, an Englishman’s word is not automatically accepted as being his bond.

On Sarsfield Bridge there is a rather gloomy statue commemorating the I.R.A., a schoolmasterly figure in bronze. He is flanked incongruously by two small Russian cannons captured in the Crimean War. For here stood MacDowall’s fine statue of Viscount FitzGibbon. It was blown up in the troubles, a senseless act of vandalism. The young man seems to have been popular in the neighbourhood and certainly did no one any harm. It was no doubt intended as an act of petty revenge against his grandfather, the hated architect of the Union of whom I have more to say elsewhere. But it was Limerick’s loss.

Of this young officer a curious tale is told, for the truth of which I cannot vouch. As I have said, he was missing believed killed in the charge of the Light Brigade. A quarter of a century later, during the Second Afghan War, his regiment, the 8th Hussars, was stationed in India, near the Northwest Frontier. One evening a bowed and tattered figure was brought to the sergeant of the guard into the officers'
He spoke a halting, rusty English. Officer knew him and yet, since he was apparently a gentleman of their race in that distant place, he was led to dine. Since he did not say he was, no one asked him his name - manners were better in those days - though he mentioned Siberia. He was plainly at home and knew the usual regimental customs. After dinner, he thanked his host and disappeared into the night. An examination of regimental records showed that the sergeant's name was FitzGibbon, and that he was the son of an officer who had been in Arles, France, during the siege. I do not know if that is the truth, but I think it is possible.
mess. He spoke a halting, rusty English. No officer knew him and yet, since he was apparently a gentleman of their own race in this distant place, he was invited to dine that night. An examination of regimental records showed that the only ex-officer of the 8th Hussars who would be the stranger’s approximate age, and whose whereabouts could not be accounted for, was Lord FitzGibbon. Kipling based a short story on this incident, which he entitled

**The Man Who Was.**

So far as I know, this unfortunate young man’s only other appearance in literature are the following impolite lines by Hogan, the Bard of Thomond, who emigrated to America from which land he returned by popular subscription. No doubt his style appealed to the Limerick temperament:

There he stands in the open air,
The bastard son of the late Lord Clare.
They call him FitzGibbon but his name was Moore,
Cause his father was a cuckold and died a bachelor.

Effective but, I am glad to say, untrue. The real story is slightly less repugnant. The third Earl, when he was Mr. FitzGibbon and M.P. for Limerick, informed his local representative that of his four children, with whom he eloped and lived openly in sin, as they say, Mr. Crosbie Moore seduced him in 1824, and a Dublin jury awarded the unfortunate husband the considerable sum of £6,000 damages. An Act of Parliament was necessary to obtain a divorce. However I had sufficient self-control to avert my eyes from the object of my desire.

And here I must stop to comment on the beauty of the Limerick women. I have been in Arles. I have lived in Rome. I have frequently walked down Fifth Avenue, but never anywhere have I seen so many handsome girls as in or about Limerick. And without benefit of John Jameson, half the female guests could easily have replaced Lady Lavery on the Irish banknotes. Indeed perhaps advantageously, for they quite lacked that famous beauty’s slight insipidity of expression. Or rather, swan-like creatures they were, proud of carriage and with that easy, open smile which comes of assurance and the knowledge that their men both love and respect them. In the streets of Limerick, too, the girls were startlingly beautiful, and there was nothing in them, any more self-assured than the men. I think that the ideal rhythm of life for men and women is not quite the same, and that the rhythm which prevails in a devoutly Catholic community makes for feminine happiness. Certainly, in the vast majority of cases, promiscuity does not occur in Ireland, and there is none of that. To keep her boy-friend a Limerick girl does not have to go too far with him. Indeed she would get a tremendous wigging from her father-confessor should she do so, as would the boy. Thus can they be beautiful, flirtatious, and unlike creatures they are, proud of carriage and with that easy, open smile which comes of assurance and the knowledge that their men both love and respect them. And a community where the women are happy must be, by definition, a happy society. The few who cannot manage or do not like a life of chastity can always move to Dublin or London. This accounts for the fact that Irish women in England have a reputation which is grotesque if applied to Irish women in Ireland. In this connection I heard an anecdote about some American politicians.

It seems that these gentlemen, returning to their native shore after one of their junkets about Europe, were stranded overnight at a hotel near Shannon airport. The local head of the air line did his best to make them comfortable with bottle and glass. After a while one of the politicians remarked that since his party was to be an impromptu party it would be as well to invite some girls. Who ever heard of a party without girls? The air line official, slightly worried, said that he could invite some of the air hostesses from the field. At this point another Irishman who happened to be present carefully pointed out that in Western Ireland the girls insisted on marriage as a sine quo non. (Though no doubt a sort of gigantomania, it was a fact.) That party never took place. One day, when I was talking to a shop-keeper at a village some miles from Limerick, I had occasion to comment on the beauty of the Limerick women.

They’re beautiful,’ he agreed, ‘and they can fight too.’

He knew how they had fought, side by side with their men, during the siege. So did I, for was not an ancestress of mine killed while helping repel a Williamite assault?

The young man’s only other appearance in literature are the following impolite lines by Hogan, the Bard of Thomond, who emigrated to America from which land he returned by popular subscription. No doubt his style appealed to the Limerick temperament.
route lay through Limerick and I asked for, and got, a lift.

When next I met my host I commented on the philosopher whom I had found in his kitchen. The veins on my host's neck thickened. This man - this scoundrel, he called him - was his pig man. During the night of the party my host's champion sow had been about to farrow, which accounted for the pig man's presence. But at four o'clock, when my host left his guest to have a look at the creature he found she had already farrowed unassisted and had, moreover, crushed two of her newly-born and valuable young. The pig man was sound asleep in the kitchen, unwakeable. The host, forced to neglect his guests, had remained with the sow until half-past eight. When he then went, in a temper that was understandably not of the best, to find the pig man once again, the latter had addressed him in drooling and impertinent words. My host had thereupon shaken his employee and attempted to slap him into some sort of sense. The pig man had walked out, swearing revenge. He was now threatening to take an action against his former employer.

No, farming is not easy in these parts. The land is lush and fertile, well-watered and astonishingly green. A Kerry man, looking at his stony acres, told me that in Tipperary the grass grows with an almost miraculous speed. Throw a stick into a field at sunset, he said, and in the morning you won't be able to find it - the grass will have grown up over it. An exaggeration no doubt, but still this area could be cultivated as intensively as any in the world, if due allowance be made for the heavy rainfall and the land carefully drained. It is not. One ragged field of pasture succeeds another for mile after rich mile, and hedging and ditching are carried out in what seems a half-hearted manner to one who is accustomed to the trim fields of England. Even the raising of cattle, which is the easiest and laziest sort of agriculture, is not particularly well done.

The indolence of the Munster peasantry has been the subject of comment for two centuries. The causes are not hard to find. In the old days the system of land tenure was such that a man who improved his holding almost automatically found his rent raised. A greater inducement to indolence could hardly be imagined, and low-level subsistence farming, the Paddy and his Pig of English legend, became to a certain extent the rule. Secondly, when working for another man, he was, for generation after generation, working for the most oppressive, callous and stupid class of landlords that has ever blighted a fair countryside. (There were many honourable exceptions, of course, but the generalization is a true one.) He could hardly be expected to show loyalty to his employer or enthusiasm for his work.

That is all changed now. The men who farm the bigger farms are no longer alien exploiters, but country traditions still die hard ... And despite rather sporadic and half-hearted encouragement from the government, the drift from the land continues. As everywhere else it is the more ambitious and more useful young people who go to Cork and Limerick and Dublin. The land cannot spare them. But the government is keen on encouraging industrialization as well, and in a country the size of Ireland this is bound to lead to competition between the two branches of the nation's wealth.

Drive across Ireland in any direction and you see mile after mile of cowland, interspersed with the many small farms that produce little more than is needed by the farmer's family. Up on the hillsides, of course, there are sheep and there are also some thousands of acres of barley, almost all of which is transmogrified into Guinness, but in general it is cows all the way, and very handsome cattle they are too. They are pleasant, pacific beasts. If somewhat boring, as they wander vacantly along the roads or sit and chew in their damp meadows.

Thousands and thousands of cows, from the little black Kerries who, it is said, 'remember Sunday' because on Sundays they used to be bled to provide their owners with something to supplement the weekly starvation diet of cabbage and potatoes, to Herefords and Jerseys and Longhorns and Shorthorns and all the rest of the great cow family. They are the real wealth of Ireland, as they have been for a thousand years or more. But the transient visitor may wonder if this wealth is not too uniform, if too many Irish eggs are not in this one basket. There was something near panic when it was feared this year that the English epidemic of foot-and-mouth disease might spread across the Irish Sea. Yet sooner or later there is bound to be a bad outbreak. And when that happens will it be possible to localize it in a land where the farming, above all superfi-

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