

THE IRISH DELEGATES IN NEW ZEALAND.

(By one of them, SIR THOMAS GRATTAN ESMONDE, M.P.,
in *United Ireland*.)

Of all our journeying that, perhaps, to which we look back with the pleasantest recollections was our journeying in New Zealand. Whether it was owing to the influence of climate, of scenery, or of the friends we met and made, I cannot say; but we look back to the home of the warlike Maori with a sentiment into which gratitude and kindness enter much, both on our own personal account and on account of the profitable prosecution of the purpose that took us there. Some episodes of our travel in New Zealand are worth recording. I was once doing a long drive in the South Island, through a wild, wooded, mountainous region, where primeval woodland spread for miles—unnumbered miles—around, and jagged mountain peaks soared thousands of feet into the sky. We started at daybreak. I was the only passenger on the coach. My driver was a pleasant, chatty fellow, and his company helped to lighten the tedium of the way. Several of the usual coaching accidents or incidents also came to our assistance.

At one place, when crossing a stony ford, we broke one of the springs of our ramshackle conveyance, and had to fix it up as best we could with bits of cord. At another point we had to pass a bush fire. The forest all about was smoking and smouldering. On reaching a certain narrow turn we found, in addition to the blinding smoke, a fresh impediment in the shape of two charred and blackened trees, which had fallen across the road. We had both to take off our coats and set to work to move them away. This we did, after an hour's hard labour, so as to allow the coach to pass, by means of levers hastily improvised from saplings cut by the wayside. Towards nightfall we made the "accommodation house," a three-roomed wooden structure, standing solitary in a grand wild mountain gorge by the bank of a rushing silvery stream. The horses unyoked, we adjourned inside to discuss the invariable meal of strong tea and tough mutton. We were stiff and sore, but as hungry as hawks, and did ample justice to the fare provided. That point satisfactorily settled, I ensconced myself in a chair by the huge open hearth, in which a roaring bonfire of logs spluttered and leaped and crackled. I was soon deep in the "Gaul Journal," under the benign influence of a pipe. How we do enjoy a pipe after a hard day! Presently I heard a noise behind me of heavy stamping. I paid no attention to it at first, thinking it might be the coachboy sorting his mails, though inwardly I marvelled at his ponderous clogs. However, the stamping continued, and I kept on never minding. I was too tired, too lazy, and too comfortable to be curious. But the stamping still continued and came nearer by degrees. Finally I lost patience, and turned in my seat to suggest to my companion to leave his blessed mail-bags in peace for the night, when, lo! what did I see?—a great red cow, with an inquisitive face, and horns as they have them in Texas or in the Campagna, blinking at me across the table! Visions of the wild cattle of New Zealand flashed before me. Stories of furious mad bulls rushed into my reeling brain. I sprang from my chair in terror. My consternation must have been contagious, for while I rushed to hide myself beside a pile of firewood in the farthest corner, my visitor also disappeared through the window, which, in her haste to leave me, she forgot to open.

Another time I was going by rail from one meeting to another— one of a series of meetings in the course of one of those series of meetings to which one looks forward with trembling, physical and mental; and to which, when ended, one looks back as to a nightmare. You people in Ireland who stay at home in ease, if you only knew how hard we work for you abroad, if you only knew how hard the work is, and how hard we have to work to do it! Well! you'd put up statues to us anyhow at each cross-roads. But you know nothing of it at all. No one who has not undergone the awful ordeal of an oratorical campaign in foreign lands knows what it means—has even a conception of its meaning. Travelling day after day in all sorts of weathers, anyhow and everyhow. Talking night after night to all sorts of audiences, and under all sorts of strange conditions. Too tired to sleep; with nerves on edge, a brain reduced to a condition of strabot, and a throat so strained by incessant use that it is the very cruellest of cruel tortures to answer even "Good morning!" How one hates the dreadful music of a brass band. How one loathes the agony of public reception, of addresses upon railway platforms and from hotel windows and all the rest of the many things prompted by our friends' exuberant kindness of heart, wholly innocent as they are of the excruciating pain it means to those whom they delight to honour. Well, my train was slowly drawing into the little wayside station. The platform was packed with a joyous crowd. The brass band was going it with a will. I lay in my seat limp, played out barely alive. There was a rush to the different carriages. All wanted to discover the "envoy"—to look at him, to wring his hand, to hear him speak. There was a tall, venerable man—a fellow-traveller—standing by the door looking out upon the scene, wondering, perchance, what was the occasion of the gathering. Two or three enthusiasts hailed him:—"Hello! Are you the Irish member of Parliament?" He grasped the situation on the moment. "No," said he, "thank God, I'm not!" and inwardly I wished that he were me.

Another time my fellow-worker, John Dillon, played a prank upon the West Coast, which was nearly at my expense, and which will prevent at least one New Zealander ever forgetting either of us. He had gone on before and was reaping in a golden harvest night after night from the West Coast miners, assuredly the most devoted, enthusiastic, and open-handed Irishmen upon the face of the earth. At one place—which shall be nameless—he had held a splendid meeting. The miners had gathered in from the bush, the gorge, the mountain, for leagues upon leagues all around, bringing their gold dust, and their gold nuggets, and their still more precious sympathy for the cause of the old land. They asked him, when leaving, about his brother "envoy." "Was he coming?" "Could they see him?" "And when?" "They were out on a holiday." A week or a month made

no difference to them." "They'd wait to see the 'other man,' if he were passing that way." John Dillon, with absolute guilelessness, told them the other man was coming. When, he wasn't certain; but this he knew, that the "other man" was coming down *incoog*, and that, if they meant to catch him, they'd have to be wide awake. Away went Dillon. The miners stayed behind. Every inch of the incoming road was patrolled. Not a buggy drove in for the next two or three days that was not stopped and searched. At last a buggy hove in sight. It was recognised as that of the M.P. for the district. He himself was in it, and there was another man with him. At once the alarm was given. The word flew round—"The other man has come."

The boys turned out in their hundreds. In a twinkling the horses were unyoked; the chaise was seized by brawny arms and drawn along in triumph to the hotel. At last they had the "other man." "No mistake this time!" "They'd caught him!" "Hooray for Parnell!" "Hooray for Home Rule!" "Hooray for the Plan of Campaign!" The occupants of the buggy couldn't quite make it all out. The M.P. thought the welcome was for himself, and heightened the illusion of the welcomes by taking off his hat and waving it in response to their cheers. Then it began to dawn upon his companion—who wasn't me at all—that he went for something in it. He soon found out what it all meant. He was Esmonde. "But he wasn't." "He vowed he wasn't." He had nothing to do with him." "He wasn't even a Home Ruler!" Not a bit of use! The buggy was dragged up to the hotel, and he was bundled upstairs to the window, where five hundred stentorian pairs of lungs greeted him with thunderous calls for a speech. He again protested he wasn't the "envoy." "He didn't even know the 'other man.'" "He had never seen him in his life." Not a bit of use! All his disclaimers were completely thrown away! "None of your larks, young fellow!" "You're Esmonde." "Dillon says so." "You can't play it off on us!" "No fear." "You're travelling *incoog*, you villain!" "To the d—! with your *incoog*. We're cuter than Balfour!" "We have you now!" "Speech, speech." "Ireland for ever." "Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!" And the poor wretch had to make a speech. What he said was never recorded. Nobody ever knew, if he even knew it himself. It was drowned in cheers. That done, he was taken downstairs again and had to shake hands with every man and woman there. Such a hand-shaking! They had it in for him with his *incoog*, and took it out of him till his shoulders ached again. Then he had to drink all their healths until his remaining wits were clean "stole away." And when at last he was packed into his buggy and sent on his way amid wild "hurrahs," he was an interesting study for a thought-reader, and had been well baptised into Irish agitatorship.

When I came by a day or two later the miners had melted away like the snow. I met my counterpart afterwards with his arm in a sling, and all New Zealand held its sides over the joke for full nine days.

Another time John Dillon and I were very near going to Heaven, or that other region, where some would think us better placed. We were coaching from Hokitika on the West Coast—at the conclusion of our tour along it—to Christchurch on the East—where another campaign was about to begin. Our route lay through the famous Oira gorge. The Oira is one of the sights every visitor to New Zealand should see. The scenery all along the route is unspeakably grand. For half the day you ascend through valleys and mountain gorges, following the sinuous course of a river-bed. Mountains hem you in on all sides; their bases draped in forest green and brown, and their sharp-cut peaks glistening white with eternal snows.—About half way you reach the summit of the pass; the remainder of the evening you descend through scenery equally savagely sublime. We were about the middle of the last steep rise at whose summit stands the frowning gateway of the pass. Upon our left a precipitous wall of rock rose to the sky line. To the right it fell perpendicularly down to where hundreds of feet below the torrent foamed and brawled and thundered. The track cut on the face of the cliff is just wide enough to allow one vehicle to pass. There is no projecting wall nor fence along its verge. Our five horses were straining at their collars. The traces of the heavy coach were as taut as fiddle strings. Suddenly we came to where a land-slip had taken place. A gang of men were working to repair the road. They had formed a temporary bridge of planks of merely sufficient width for the coach-wheels over the chasm. The appearance of the structure was of the ugliest.—But there was no going back. On we lumbered. With dexterous hand our driver walked his horses on to the causeway. The coach rolled after them. When in the very centre there was a crash!—Some of the planking had given way. There was a second's pause. The carriage swayed! Another second and we were over into the abyss. But the horses threw themselves forward! Stumbled! Stretched their harness to the last inch! Nobody spoke! Nobody breathed! There was a tagging! Another crash! A jolt! and thank heaven we were again upon solid ground. So close was it, that the lamps on the left hand side flattened against the overhanging rocky wall! But we were safe! and we breathed again.

As for the New Zealanders, we found them hospitable of the hospitable; kindest of the kindly; and generous beyond thanking in their expression of their sympathy with Ireland. In no other part of the globe have I seen so proportionately magnificent a generosity towards her cause as I have among the miners of the West Coast.—Taking New Zealand all round, we succeeded there even more signally than we did in Australia. With some three exceptions the New Zealand Press was hotly on our side. Our receptions at the chief cities such as Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin, were such as we never ventured to anticipate. We had every reason to be more than pleased by the attitude towards us by New Zealand's public men. The leaders amongst them came upon our platforms, wrote in our favour, spoke for us, and subscribed to our funds. First and foremost among them was their noblest Roman, New Zealand's grand old man, Sir George Grey. A veteran grown old in the Imperial service, and distinguished whether as a governor of Imperial dependencies, as a statesman, a diplomat, a soldier, or a man of letters amongst the foremost men of his time and of his race.