THE CLADDAGH FISHERMEN

On approaching Galway town, the tourist in Ireland will perceive many evidences that he is in a peculiar district. The dark features and coal-black hair of the people indicate their Spanish descent—a relic of those days when, during the latter part of the twelfth century, the town was gradually taken possession of by Anglo-Norman families, whose commerce with France and Spain became so extensive that Galway was reckoned one of the wealthiest and most populous towns in Ireland. Almost every peasant might serve as a model for a sculptor, and one is scarcely prepared to find that nearly every lane or alley contains some token of the grandeur of olden days, and that over the doorways of a very large number of the dilapidated houses, the armorial bearings, carved in stone, may still be seen.

If, however, in the town are to be found the records of a peculiar people, in one of the suburbs a people equally peculiar exist, retaining the customs and habits they have kept unchanged for centuries. The inhabitants of the Claddagh are a colony of fishermen, and they number with their families, between two and three thousand. Their market-place is held in an open square and adjoins the remains of an old fortification built over two archways, one closed up, the whole half-ruined but beautiful by age. From the built-up arch comes the familiar name of the place 'the blind arch'—the other giving a charming vista of quay, shipping, sea, and mountains. Here they sell their fish, but it is apart from their own dominion, which, when one catches a first glimpse of it, looks as if it consisted merely of a few houses scattered here and there, or, rather, cottages, with thatched roofs. But, when one gets fairly into the place, it is found to be much more extensive, the cabins being built in irregular squares and circles, surrounding pretty little grass plots where the young children play, and where the women of the Claddagh spread out the fishing-nets to dry and to be mended.

From the Claddagh pier one can see the fleet at anchor—and turning to look ashore, get a full view of the 'oldest fishing colony in Ireland.' Some of the men will be seen gathered in groups about the chapel gate, the spot they favor most of all, quietly smoking and chatting. Others are working away, repairing their boats, tarring them, or mending their fishing-tackle. There is the ever-present, the ever-beautiful, ever-varying wide and rapid river, rushing and tumbling in its hurry to get away from the town, and out into the bay, in its mad haste to reach the sea. For ages this once flourishing fishing colony has been established here—and is supposed to have been a fishing village since the first peopling of Ireland. They have seen many changes of fortune, all for the worse, unhappily, none for the better, yet through it all have remained the same happy, unspoiled race, living entirely to themselves, and seldom to be met in the streets of the town except when the women go there to sell their fish, somewhat after the fashion of the old song, and with somewhat of the same sorrowful meaning in their cry:

'Who'll buy my herring?
Oh, you may call them vulgar faring;
Wives and mothers, most despairing,
Call them lives of men!'

They have always had their own church, their own festivities and their own head, or law-giver—their king, as he was styled—although the office and the title are practically obsolete. Formerly the king or mayor was chosen once a year, with much pomp and ceremony. The chief characteristics that recommended him to his subjects were his wisdom and his intelligence. It was his duty to guide the fleet at sea, to understand the laws of the bay and to see them enforced, while ashore he made the laws for his people. When the fleet went out, the king, acting as admiral, led them all—a color at the head of the mast showing which boat was his. He chose the fishing ground, gave the word at which every net was cast at the same moment, so that all might participate equally in the harvest God was pleased to send them. And then, when the boats came home, the women met them. King and people resigned all care into their hands, for on shore the wives and mothers attend to fish, purse, and home.

To this very day the Claddagh people are tenacious of the rights they have enjoyed for centuries. They are, like all fisher-folk, superstitious, and they will not draw a net or set a hook on certain days, nor will they permit any one else to do so. A gentleman in the neighborhood once endeavored to break through this custom, and manned his own boat. When the 'fishing pirate,' as they called her, was seen crossing the bay, the alarm was sounded, and every man sprang for his own boat to go in pursuit. The invader retreated precipitately, and it was a matter of surprise that he escaped without harm.

Even if a Galway man, who is not a Claddagh man, offends, he is punished by the Claddagh laws. For instance, a gentleman complained of the price of a codfish he had bought. It was too dear, in his estimation—and he refused to pay at all. He told the fisherman that he could summon him for the price of it, if he liked, but this was against Claddagh law, and it was not done. Some days afterwards he went to order fish for a dinner party, going to another part of the Claddagh.

'No, sir,' was the reply. 'I can't serve you until you have paid So-and-so for the cod you bought of him.'

'What is that to you?' asked the gentleman. 'I'm willing to pay you for your fish.'

'Not until you've paid him for his,' was the rejoinder. 'We Claddagh men stick together.'

From ancient times in all Catholic countries has been observed the blessing of the sea—and this, too, is a Claddagh custom.

REFORM OF THE CALENDAR

There is considerable excitement at the present time about the necessity of reforming the calendar (writes Abbe Th. Moreux, Director of the Observatory of Bourges, in *America*), and several Congresses have formulated resolutions on the subject, but from all appearances, no solution of the difficulties that face the reformers will be arrived at. The reform proposes (1) to assign a fixed date for Easter; and (2) to make a more regular distribution of the weeks of the year.

Ever since the Council of Nice, Catholics have celebrated Easter on the Sunday after the full moon which follows the 20th of March. In keeping with this tradition, therefore, Easter always occurs after the spring equinox and in the course of the full moon. But the moon which regulates the ecclesiastical computation is not the moon in the heavens but the calendar moon. Hence it follows that, at times, the tradition is disregarded, and Easter comes a little earlier or a little later; but in any case it is easy to see, if we study the matter ever so little, that the feast must occur according to the years, between the 22nd of March and the 25th of April.

Hence it would be a decided advantage, say the reformers, if once for all we could assign the first Sunday of April as Easter day. Thus we should always take into account at least a part of the old rule, since the spring equinox always occurs on the 20th or the 21st of March.

Some time ago, through the courtesy of the Director of the Vatican Observatory, who acted as intermediary, I requested the opinion of Pope Leo XIII. about the matter. He answered very frankly that he would accept the new arrangement if the Synod of the Russian Church would avail itself of the opportunity to arrange their calendar in accordance with ours. But since then new changes have been suggested and the question has