

Tales of the River Fergus

by

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of Low Island

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ON SHANNON AND FERGUS Schooners, Windjammers and Yachts

An item of interest appeared in last week's issue of your popular paper under the caption of: "No Boats on the River at Kildysart."

As one of the old-timers who cruised down the river on board the pleasure boat mentioned, to the strains of the old-time waltzes, I would like to state some facts that may be of interest to the present generation. One fine day away back in the 'eighties, after a prolonged period of stormy, broken weather, I counted no fewer than forty-eight sailing craft, of all descriptions, sailing up the Shannon. The noble river was dotted with sail from Tarbert to the Horserock Lighthouse, as all had been weather-bound in their different harbours along the whole length of the river from Carrigaholt to Limerick.

To give your readers some idea of the number of sailing boats on the Shannon in those far-off days: There were three large trading boats, which served Kildysart and Ballynacally, viz., "The Blackbird," "Baronjoss" and "The Mary," while the pilots at Lower Island were the owners of three others, for the seaweed trade. I could give the names of a least twenty of those large sailing boats, which served the ports and harbours with merchandise for the towns and villages near the banks of the river. To mention a few, there was the "Bella" from Kilrush; "St. Michael," Carrigaholt; "Jane," Limerick City; "Dreadnot," Glin, and so on. Messrs Russell, of Limerick, kept a seagoing schooner named the "Sealark."

THREE WINDJAMMERS.

On one occasion, no fewer than three windjammers could be seen at anchor off Low Island, while at the same time, four schooners were also at anchor in the estuary of the Fergus, awaiting the spring tides, to proceed to Limerick and Clarecastle, respectively. In addition, there was a number of turfboats from Moyasta supplying turf to Limerick, Askeaton and Bighcastle on the Limerick shore.

The first steamboat to ply on the river was designed and built by a gentleman, who also built a private quay for the boat close to his residence at Kildysart. This boat was named the "Turk" and served the traders for a number of years until the owner had to give up seafaring owing to ill-health. The traders of the town were then in a quandary as to how to obtain their supplies from Limerick. They got together, therefore, formed a Company and purchased a steamboat named the "Glenevy." This ship was an ill-fated one. She was put under the charge of one of the Low Island pilots, who was a resident of the town for a number of years, and he, in turn, as captain, choose his crew. All went well for a few years and then came the terrible years of 1919-'20 when the Black-and-Tan reign of terror was at its height.

A MIDNIGHT RAID.

A famous leader of the East Clare I.R.A. took his flying column for a night attack on the British garrison at Kilrush. After the attack the column retreated by way of Ballynacally to the bank of the Fergus at Rosscliff. Here they were met by the boys from the Island and taken aboard a large lighter and rowed across the Fergus to the lonely shore of Rhineanna, at that time a sanctuary for wildfowl. Sometime later, the good ship "Glenevy" was about to land at the Quay, Kildysart, laden with merchandise for the town. To the great surprise of the Captain, the Quay was crowded with Auxiliaries. Those men jumped aboard the ship the moment it touched the Quay, and the officer in charge ordered the Captain at the point of the pistol to tum his vessel about and proceed up the river and by the route mentioned as compared to the Rhine; until they had reached a point between Paradise and Deer Island. In the meantime, the Captain ordered his engineer secretly, of course to shut off steam and go dead

slow. This was with the object of giving the Island boys warning of the approach of the raiders, who were quite visible at a distance crowded on deck. The officer in charge must have got suspicious of this, as he threatened both the Captain and Engineer to get up full steam—or else. This they refused to do, stating that the safety of the ship and the cargo were at stake and also the pilot's licence.

SEARCH OF DEER ISLAND.

The raiders landed on Deer Island and searched every house there but, of course, failed to find any of the mon on the run. However, to mark their disappointment, they fired several volleys from their rifles at the Island from the deck of the vessel with the object of creating terror among the inhabitants. The names of the gallant Captain and his Engineer were Capt. Paddy Lillis (called to his eternal reward some years ago) and the Engineer, Paddy Doohan.

Sometime later, this ship returned from Limerick, laden with the usual cargo, and was moored to the Pier Head, Cahercon, to await high water before reaching the Quay at Kildysart, the skipper going by road to the town, with a view of attending to business matters in connection with the cargo.

Unfortunately, during his absence the ship caught fire and, as the hull was constructed of wood, there was no chance of saving either ship or cargo. This caused a very severe loss to the traders of Kildysart, so much so that the ill-fated "Glenevy" was the last boat for the townfolk to own.

CUP RACE ECHO.

Another memorable event took place over the same stretch of water away back in the 'eighties. It was the arrival of a beautiful big ocean sailing yacht named the "Galatea." This boat was after competing in what was known as the American Cup Race, sailed off Sandy Hook, New York, and, though beaten, was by no means disgraced. The yacht's arrival was timed for a Sunday afternoon, and as the hour approached, the shore at Paradise was covered with spectators, including the local band aboard a large lighter awaiting at the anchorage. The owner was Willie Henn, a Captain in the British Navy in those days, and his family were rightly proud of their beautiful mansion standing on high ground overlooking the Shannon and Fergus

M.J.T. – Clare Champion 17 June 1950

CLARE FISH AND SEAWEED

To the Editor.

Sir—One interested wishes to know what has become of the kelp-burning, sea-fishing and neglected wealth that lies around our coast in seaweed, etc.

An enterprising firm has started a Chemical Factory in the town of Kilrush, where seaweed and kelp are used, and the collection of seaweed is increasing rapidly, as the collectors obtain a reasonable price for the weed. The foreshore of West Clare is short and in many places sandy, hence the supply is far short of the amount required by the factory. It is only among the islands on the Fergus, where large areas of rock are exposed at low tide, that hundreds of tons of weed can be gathered. Owing to the population, there are no young men left to collect the weed. Over half a-century ago, and before the advent of fertilisers, a huge trade was carried on by the sale of this seaweed for farmyard manure.

In former times, numbers of small fishing boats came down the Shannon from Limerick City and worked all night in moonlit nights, and one fisherman living in Askeaton was supplied with a modern boat and gear, but he had to dispose of the craft owing to its earnings not being sufficient to pay the instalments. The Islanders need but go down to the shore to catch fish, yet they do not do so. The only explanation for the decline would appear to be that the residents of those places, where fish abound, do not seem to have a taste for fish.

M.J.T. – Clare Champion 8 September 1951

Shooting on the Fergus

It Was Once a Fowler's Paradise

Many years ago before large areas of slobland were reclaimed from the river, the Fergus was a fowler's paradise. Myriads of wild fowl, including geese, mallard, widgeon, teal, curlew, grey and green plover, not to mention different species of smaller birds, frequented the feeding grounds of the river and the numerous islands situated on its estuary.

Keen rivalry existed between the young men on the islands as to which should bag most of the birds, for it meant not only keeping the home larder stocked, but a certain amount of pocket money as well for the boys. They used heavy old converted military muskets for their purpose, and for the most part each was the owner of a large, brown, curly haired rat-tailed retriever.

INTELLIGENT GUN DOGS

These were, wonderful intelligent gun dogs. Whenever their owner shot a few birds on the water, one being only wounded, the retriever would swim past the dead birds and follow the wounded one perhaps for a mile or more in the cold water, and would not give up until it had reached its quarry. The fowlers were watching the habits of the birds and could imitate the whistle of the widgeon on a foggy day, and so decoy them within gun shot. They knew the value of camouflage also, and it was a sight to see them dressed in a certain white garment

worn over their ordinary clothes_, crawling along the snow covered ground unnoticed by the wild duck in snowy weather.

LURED TO THEIR DOOM

A species of duck called "divers" also frequented the river. These birds fed like the cormorant by diving constantly for their food. Like the cat, curiosity often lured them to their doom, as for instance when the fowler took up his position behind the river bank opposite where the birds were diving. He would then throw a pebble on to the beach, and tell his dog find it. The dog jumped over the bank and started to run around the beach in search of the pebble, and, strange as it may appear, the divers swam at once with all speed to find out, as it were, what the dog was at, and so got shot for their pains. The wild geese were the most difficult to get within gun shot as they flew at a great height and fed in the most inaccessible places. RINEANNA, FEENISH AND ING

Rineanna, Feenish and Ing were their favourite haunts. The fowlers generally went in pairs to those places, taking two light casks with them in their boat. They took up opposite positions on the feeding ground early in the afternoon and sank their casks in the soft ground or mud. They then got a bunch of the surrounding sedge or rushes_, got into the casks, camouflaged their surroundings and waited patiently.

HUGE FLOCKS OF WILD GEESE

Towards evening huge flocks of geese approached flying at a great altitude in V formation, and, like the huge Constellations and Skymasters and Viscounts of to-day, they circled Rineanna, coming closer to the ground with every circle, scanning every inch of the ground with lynx eyes. During this time the birds kept up a low rapid cackle as if conversing in a language of their own, while following the leader. If all seemed well, they soon alighted and at once some of their number took up sentry. These invariably stood on one leg, turning their heads from side to side to keep watch in all directions, and, believe it or not, if these particular birds started to feed, they would be surrounded by some of the others and beaten with their wings. Soon they would come within shot of one or other of the watchers hidden in the casks, and it generally happened that when one fired his gun the birds flew over the spot where his comrade lay hidden and he in turn, got a shot at the birds as they flew over his head.

"MONARCH OF ALL I SURVEY"

An Englishman who was believed to have come from the Norfolk Broads, came to the Fergus in a big sailing yacht each winter. He kept the yacht at anchor, on the sheltered side of Low Island and lived aboard. He had a fowling punt and what was known to the island boys as the "big gun" on the deck of the yacht. The punt was a long, low, needle shaped craft decked all over save for a small hatch at her stern where two expert gunners crept on board and lay on their backs quite concealed. The big gun was mounted on a small pivot on deck and securely tied with a stout rope to prevent damage from the recoil of the shot and all was painted a sea green. The whole structure was not more than a foot over the water, and when stealing on the duck, the punt looked like a drifting log. One man paddled gently forward with a tiny paddle, his gun barely visible over the side, while the second manipulated the gun. On occasions at low water, when the duck were congregated in a long line on the brink of the water, a shot from this gun meant mass murder of the innocents, as at least fifty brace of duck were lying dead and numbers mortally wounded. The report from the gun was as loud as a twopounder from a warship, and so scared were the birds that they deserted the feeding grounds for days and weeks. The island boys were fully alive to the damage caused to their preserves and took measures to counteract this state of affairs. They watched every movement of the fowling punt, and waited at a safe distance until the craft was almost within shot of the duck. Then they let bang with their old "Queen Anne's." In most cases the birds flew off or scattered in

all directions. The owner of the yacht who was the "monarch of all I survey" type saw all this with his glass from the deck of his yacht and actually came ashore to the boys and remonstrated with them for their misconduct in frightening the birds.

NO GUN LICENCES

Those lads had no gun licences, and Balfour's Coercion Act being in vogue at the time, they adopted another ruse. They turned a boat upside down on the beach and waited until the punt approached a big flock of duck. At the critical moment they would give the bottom of the up turned boat a resounding wallop of a caulker's mallet. The sound of the blows was similar to a gun shot and had the desired effect on the birds. The only answer the man in the yacht could make was "these fellows seem to be always repairing their rotten boats."

CHANGED TIMES NOW

And now the flight and cackle of the wild geese is heard no more over Rineanna; the huge Skymasters and Constellations have taken their place. The roar of their mighty engines at night has taken the place of the cackle of the wild geese and the lonely call of the curlew. The rattailed retrievers are extinct as far as the islands on the Fergus are concerned. So time and change march on, hand in hand. It was most interesting to watch the habits of the wild birds. Small numbers of both mallard and shelduck nested on the small uninhabited islands. They took their young on to the water soon after being hatched, and if a small rowing boat approached unexpectedly, the mother took to flight while her young brood dived beneath the water. The old bird flew not more than one hundred yards when she dropped on the water as if she was shot, flapping her wings and pretending to be in dire distress. If the boat followed, she would repeat the performance until the boat was a safe distance from her young. When that time had come she flew back triumphantly and collected her young with loud cries of glee.

A NOVEL EXPERIMENT

One day two of the islanders went rabbit hunting to one of those unoccupied islands, accompanied by two terrier dogs. One of the terriers suddenly located and sprang on a mallard duck sitting on its nest, killing it before the owner could catch the dog. One of the boys remembered that a fowl was sitting on an empty nest at his home, so he took the mallard's nest, complete with the eggs, wrapped them in his coat, went home at once and put them under the fowl. The experiment was a success as the young ducklings broke shell in due course.

All went well, and they seemed happy and contented with the common ducks until winter set in. They were accustomed to feed on the foreshore with the farmyard ducks, and then came a day when a flock of mallard appeared from inshore. It was then for the first time that they heard the "call of the wild" to which they answered immediately as they swam away to Join the wild duck, never to return.

A similar case was known to have happened on another occasion, and it was then known to the islanders that once the eggs had got what they termed "part of the wild hatch" the birds were sure to depart and answer the "call of the wild"

M.J.T. - Clare Champion 10 September 1955

ANIMAL LIFE ON THE FERGUS ISLANDS Curious Incidents of half a century ago

An interesting news item appeared on the Clare Champion recently relative to two cattle purchased at the fair of Kildysart and taken to Inishtubrid for grazing, but from where they swam ashore over a mile of strong current to reach the mainland, to the owner's farm from which they came. This incident is by no means the only one concerning animal instinct that has occurred among the different islands on the River Fergus.

THE SWIMMING SHEEP

Over half, a century ago a farmer residing on Deer Island kept a dozen sheep with their lambs in a field near the shore, almost directly opposite the river bank' at Rosscliffe, where he had a farm. When the lambs had grown old enough to be weaned he took the mothers from them, put them on a boat and transferred them over a mile of water across the channel and through which runs a strong current, and put them on his farm opposite.

All went well until the lambs on the island got thirsty and as was natural began to bleat loudly. It being a calm day when the mothers, having explored their new surroundings and eaten some grass, were attracted by the constant bleating of their young ones on the opposite shore. The result was that three of the eldest of the group climbed up the bank and down the rough stone facing, plunged into the water and swam across to their offspring.

NEVER KNOWN BEFORE

It has never been known since or before that sheep, the most timid of all animals, entered the water of their own accord; nor could the islanders ever understand how they managed to swim that distance with their small feet for propulsion and survive, especially as their fleeces were in full growth at the time.

A farmer on Low Island was the owner of a small island about an acre in extent about a mile from where he resided. There was no livestock kept on this little island which could be reached on foot over a rough passage when the tides had ebbed, for about three hours, and it was customary for the farmer to drive over his milch cows for grazing purpose when fodder was scarce at Springtime. The cows would have five hours to feed on the high grass growing on the little island before the returning tide, when he would have to drive them home again.

THE PIG SWAM TOO

On one of those days he had a sow which was due to farrow and which he let out on a field near his home. When he went to drive home the pig at evening time there was no trace of the animal in the field or any place on, his farm. Next morning he searched the whole island but no trace. When the tide had receded during the day he drove off his cows to the little dot of an island which is named Derynough and the next sight he saw was his sow racing madly to attack the cows which were quick on the run for home to escape. When the cows had gone the sow ran back to a sheltered spot and he followed to investigate, as he carried a stout stick and was not afraid, and there to his astonishment he found not only his sow but thirteen bonhams, her offspring.

TO COLLECT THE NEIGHBOURS

He had to get home as fast as possible and collect some of the neighbours, three of which took shoulder-baskets with them on which to load the little piggies and bring them on their shoulders over the channel before the tide came in, while the owner had to bring a prong fork with him to keep the mother from attacking. How the animal got there was never known, but truth is sometimes stranger than fiction.

ENNIS FARMER'S EXPERIENCE

Over sixty years ago a farmer residing at Shanaway, not far from Ennis was at that time the tenant of 150 acres of land situated on the east side of Deer Island. He took a huge bull on a lead with him all the way from his residence by road to the landing stage at Rosscliffe, where with the assistance of the Islanders it was put on a lighter boat and ferried across to the island shore; the men estimating its weight to be almost a ton. From here the owner's herdsman took charge and led it along the island shore to a high stone boundary wall where a gap was made to admit it to his farm and where the animal was let loose among the large number of cattle there. Three days later the bull was missing but no sign of the high boundary wall being disturbed. The herdsman walked along the mile of shore over which he had led the animal but saw no sign of tracks on the beach. He then got on a boat and rowed across to Rosscliffe bank, and as he was about to land he saw deep tracks on the mud leading to the bank. There are two houses about one hundred yards from the bank and from one of those the owner saw him and came to meet him.

ENCOUNTER WITH BULL

This man told the herdsman that when he went to his haggard, on which was built a large rick of hay, he saw the beast lying beside it, but got on its feet on approach. He returned to his house and called on two brothers who lived with him to come and drive the bull into a cowhouse. It ran around the rick and when they tried to head it off it charged towards them. After some time one of the brothers, a powerful stronger man dropped on his knees as the bull charged with head down, grasped one of its fore-legs and tripped it over and shouted to his brothers for help. One of the brothers grasped it by the nose and the other by the horns and so held it until one of them ran for a rope and tied it up, a feat which could rival a Spanish bull-fight. The herdsman brought the news to Shanaway but the owner came and took it home as he thought if brought back to the Island it would escape again.

JUMPED INTO THE WATER

One summer, also many years ago, a cousin on the mainland requested a young man on Deer Island to come ashore and bring his horse with him to cut a field of hay for the cousin. The boy started in the early morning taking the horse and harness ashore with him in a boat and told the boatman to row across for him again at high tide in the evening. The boy finished the cutting sooner than he expected and returned to the sea bank at Rosscliffe with his horse and harness. Here he lay down on the bank to rest and let the horse graze on the grassbank after its hard day's work. After some time it moved some distance away and the boy stood up to bring it back. As the animal saw his owner approach, it gave a loud snort, jumped off the bank into the water and swam off to the island. As the horse had on its blinkers, reins, collar, backstrap and draught chains the young man was in a terrible state fearing the reins or draught chains would become entangled on its limbs causing it to drown. However, the poor horse reached the island shore safely and just as the island men had come to shore also, to row across and take it home. And so ended another episode of animal life on the islands.

THE BROWN CURLY SPANIELS

In those far-off days there were kept what were called water-dogs in the homes of the islanders, brown curly water spaniels, splendid gun dogs for fetching dead or wounded wild fowl out of the seawater. Those dogs were very affectionate, so that when their owners were about to row off in their boats to the mainland on many occasions the dogs would swim off after the boat so that the owners would have to return, take them into the boat, and bring them home again.

A farmer on one of the Islands was presented with a young collie dog by a friend on the mainland. It was not a pedigree dog but at an early age began to show a remarkable degree of sagacity. It would accompany its owner on all occasions to the shore when leaving by boat, jump about excitedly on the shore, but not even wet its paws in the water but howl melancholy until its owner left the opposite shore when it returned to the home.

WELCOME FOR THE OWNER

It then went off to sleep at the fire-side or door-step if the day was sunny. If the owner was absent two hours or four, the dog would suddenly jump to life and run off to the shore to welcome him. This dog became specially attached to one member of the family who left the home to reside in another island two miles distant. After the departure the dog prowled around the shore for days howling mournfully.

After a month or so the person referred to returned on a visit and the dog showed all its old signs of affection to the visitor, but did not cry around the shore when the visitor left again. A few months later, when the summer weather came, this dog was found apparently dead lying on the door-step of the home to where the person was then residing, its coat all covered with mud and seawater. It was brought in to the house, washed and put before the fire, and after some hours recovered.

COULD NEVER UNDERSTAND

What was most remarkable and what the islanders could not understand was that this dog was never seen to enter the water at anytime and yet it left its home at night, travelled over two miles of slob and seawater and was found unconscious on the door-step of a house on an island it had never seen, in the early morning.

Stranger still, when the dog was fully recovered it seemed happy and content to remain there with the owner's dog for company. However, when the owners went out to where the dogs slept, one morning, the visitor was gone and found to have returned to its old home. •

But that did not end the story as it returned for one or two visits under similar circumstances before it grew too old to swim the Fergus at the dead of night.

M.J.T. – Clare Champion 26 May 1956

Lower Shannon 60 Years Ago

The Editor, Clare Champion. Dear Sir,

A news item appeared in last week's issue of your paper, which stated that Messrs Walsh's packet boat from Foynes which has taken merchandise and shop goods from Limerick to Kildysart had made its last voyage, after long years of trading with the port. Looking back over the vista of those long years it would be impossible for the rising generation to believe the difference that has taken place on the Shannon of those far off years and the present time.

In those hectic days of sailing boats the river was crowded with them, from huge windjammers to tiny fishing boats or pleasure yachts; to cargo boats with grain, turf and seaweed. Messrs Banatyne & Russell of Limerick, and Messrs Glynn & Sons, Kilrush, were the millers.

The windjammers had come all the way on a four months voyage from Australia or California, around Cape Horn or Goodhope, respectively, and the grain discharged by hand at the docks, Limerick. Messrs Russell and Glynn had small fleets of their own. The former had two noted cargo boats, the Skylord and the Jane, which took cargoes of grain to the port of Clarecastle for Ennis, while the latter had several large boats to bring the grain to Kilrush, one of which was noted as a very fast sailing boat and was named "The Bella." Next come the names of some of the boats which took merchandise of all sorts, from teacups to casks of stout from Messrs Guinness, with an odd cask of whiskey from a brewery situated on the North Strand, Limerick. One of those was the boat "Mary" which supplied the shopkeepers at Ballynacally and Ballycorick. The Blackbird and Baronjoss, Kildysart; the Saint Patrick, Labasheeda; all on the Clare side of the river.

On the Limerick and Kerry sides of the river a cargo boat was to be found at every port: Ringmoylan, Beigh Castle, Glynn, Tarbert, etc. The Dreadnaught was noted as a large boat but light draught for shallow water. All those have now disappeared, the Foynes boat being the last.

The traders of Kildysart were best served for many years by reason of the fact that the late Bianconi O'Connell, whose forbears were pioneers on finding means of transit on land, got the idea of building a steamboat to supply the town as the sailing boats were often weather-bound in some sheltered spot on the river for days and this happened a few times with Christmas supplies on board.

Sad to state, this great man was called away to his eternal reward at a comparatively early age. The merchants of Kildysart had therefore no alternative but take over the boat. One of the Low Island pilots who had a business of his own in Kildysart was appointed Captain of the boat and all went well until 1920 or thereabouts when one day the boat arrived at the quay with her cargo for the town. As one of the crew threw a rope on to the quay a couple of lorryloads of Auxiliary police suddenly drove up and jumped on board and at gunpoint ordered the Captain and crew to bout ship or else. . . .

There was no alternative, and they had to obey but, the Captain whispered to his engineer to set his engine at dead slow. As it transpired they intended to raid the Fergus Islands, so when the boat got on to the open channel from the creek the officer in charge ordered full speed ahead as the boat was then in view of the islands. The Captain refused, stating that the boat was heavily laden with the goods and property of the townspeople, the channel was dangerous, that if they wanted more speed they would have to increase it themselves.

As they cruised about among the islands there was no quay where they could land so they started to fire volley after volley to try and drive terror into the islanders and prevent them from hiding the boys on the run and from rowing them to safety on the sign of danger.

Later on, when danger appeared to be gone, this boat came down the river from Limerick to the Pierhead, Kildysart, on the ebbing tide. As was the usual procedure the craft was moored to the pier to await the incoming tide, which would be about six hours. While waiting the Captain said he would walk home two miles distant to see his family and fill in the time. What a shock to find the boat and cargo on fire when he returned, and as they had no fire-fighting apparatus on board, both ship and cargo were destroyed.

As there was no other boat available it was then that Messrs Walsh of Foynes took over and held the appointment all down the years until last week.

And now there is not a boat or sail to be seen on the Lower Shannon which used to be covered with them sixty years ago.

M.J.T. Clare Champion 27 October 1956

EMIGRATION OTHER PEOPLE'S VIEWS

The Editor, Clare Champion, Dear Sir,

There have been many statements made and written on the sad subject of the best of our young people leaving their homes in the Republic and emigrating to foreign lands. Many of those included married couples, with young families and without cause, even leaving reasonable employment. There have been many ideas expressed as to the cause and the means of trying to keep them at home, but sad to state the numbers are increasing yearly. For the past six months there can be seen in the daily papers more photographs of young couples from the Republic getting married in London, Birmingham, New York, Toronto and far off Australia, than in Ireland.

An English lady, making a tour of Ireland by rail last summer, had a letter published in a Dublin evening paper stating how sad it made her to witness the tearful partings of those young people from their parents and relatives. However, there does not seem to be much worry to those who should try and make some attempt to embark on some large scale project to find employment for those thousands of our young boys and girls leaving our shores for foreign lands. The irony of the whole situation is that the foreigners are being invited to take their place, start industries and give employment. The ideas of the ordinary person is that we have to depend on the foreigner to supply us with the necessary material to keep a new industry going and for which they could fix their own price when started. As everybody knows, Ireland has always been an agricultural country and will always remain so. Why then

don't our legislators start on a grand scale on the reclamation of the thousands of acres of scrub and bog land and so give employment by spending the millions that are being spent on losing projects and on the dole? As the annual Bank returns show, there are millions lying idle within their walls which could * be spent on setting up small farms of from thirty to fifty acres on those reclaimed lands, building houses thereon and letting them on the hire purchase scheme until their value is repaid. The writer would venture to suggest that if a scheme like this was started there would be a large number of those young men who left their relatives behind, and now aliens, would gladly return to the old sod and get married.

There was a comedian well known in the Co. Clare over seventy years ago. He was very popular and used to perform with the circus known as Powell and Clarkes at all the towns in Clare. His name was Johnny Patterson and he was also a composer of what was known as ballad songs, which he sang and many were the boys who used buy them and could be heard-singing them at the dances held in the farmers' houses until the next year when he would have a new one. He must also have ideas on emigration as the following brought down the house:—

Now here I am, a Munster boy,
from Ennis all the way;
To live by labour I did try and
got but " little pay,
Provisions being high and wages
low, myself I could not maintain
And so to earn ah honest living
I was forced to cross the main.

CHORUS

So we parted from the shore we
may never see no more,
Old Ireland, you're my darlin and
I'll always you adore; For it is the music of the harp,
ah, what joy recalls to heart,
Away back in the dear land of Erin!
Now the reason why we are so
poor, faith, I'll quickly tell you
Hardship sure we must endure
unless we get some work to do;
Though the land is rich and fer-
tile as we heard in many a song

Only listen for a while and I'll
point you out what's wrong. Now, if our Irish landlords in
'foreign lands did not roam,
But spent a little time in the
land they call their own;
For I'm sure there's room in each
estate for a foundry or a mill
To give work
to those Irish boys who other countries fill.

There has been a public meeting and discussion by a new society on the needs of making our country villages, etc., more presentable to tourists. It looks like a coincidence that a few days ago I had a chat with an Englishman and his wife who toured the County Clare last summer. As they approached the town of famous Kilkee in their car they could not believe it was the beautiful seaside resort, the houses and cottages on the outskirts seemed so neglected. However their impressions were soon changed as after a few days' stay in the town they headed for the coast road of the Shannon, via Kilrush, to Ennis and Limerick. They praised the variety of scenery and picturesque villages of Knock, Labasheeda, Kildysart, Ballynacally and Clarecastle, the town of Ennis and City of Limerick. They also mentioned the splendid state of the coast" road for driving in comparison with others and said they will return. Two Dublin men spoke to me also about the beautiful view of this coast road from Kilrush to Ennis. They told me that if there was a motor launch at the Port of Limerick, available for three persons to live on board, they would spend their holidays cruising around the Shannon and Fergus, -fishing, and perhaps have a shot at wild birds and visit the islands and places of interest, on both rivers.

M.J.T. – Clare Champion 28 December 1957

OTHER PEOPLE'S VIEWS A Clareman Looks Back

(Editor, Clare Champion)

Dear Sir,—A short time ago a report appeared in the Champion relative to the wreck of a French ship off the coast of Clare in the early years of the present century. Incidentally, the wreck took place in a very exposed place in the Atlantic opposite the village of Quilty. The names of those gallant men were given.

This rescue was the talk of the nation, and, needless to say, the French nation also gave their thanks, together with tokens of gratitude. The recognition of the bravery of those gallant men was not confined to Clare, as they were invited to Dublin to take part in the annual procession of industrialists, headed by the Lord Mayor and City Councillors, through the principal streets of the city, and to bring their currach with them.

This they did, and the currach, or canoe, was placed on a large horsedrawn vehicle with the gallant men of Quilty seated in the same position in the frail craft as when they rowed it over the mountainous Atlantic waves to the rescue. It is needless to state the reception they received in Dublin, and it was with pride and pleasure the writer took part in that memorable occasion of cheering crowds with shouts of bravo to his gallant county men.

TWO TYPES OF BOAT

Except the residents of the west coast of Ireland, few landsmen understand the difference between an ordinary rowing boat and a currach. The latter is a frail craft composed of a very light frame of wood with a canvas cover tacked on to the frame and painted with tar, and the craft is so light and frail that two men can lift it easily from the water when they row ashore and take it above high-water mark where it will be safe until again required. In an ordinary rowing boat, each man rows an oar with a wide blade which he can feather, as it is called, when rowing against a strong wind and rough seas. This action means that he can give a twist of the oar with each stroke to bring the edge of the oar-blade against the wind and waves so as not to retard the effect of the stroke. To man a currach, each man rows two oars which are fastened secure to the gunwales of the craft. Those are very light, with narrow blades, so that there is no need for feathering them against the wind and waves. In boat-racing there are four men in ordinary boats and three to currachs. In a tragedy which took place off the coast of Mayo a few months ago, it was stated in the newspapers that the currach on its outward voyage to Clare Island was driven by an outboard engine with four persons on board, and that the engine stopped on the outward voyage. On the return voyage there were five persons on board, and all five lost their lives.

KEEPING HEAD ON TO WAVES

After the tragedy the currach was found bottom upwards after a long search, and two of its oars were found under the seats of the boat, while two others were found floating on the water a short-distance from the craft. It would appear, therefore, that the engine must have stopped again on the return voyage and before the owner and his friends could adjust the oars to keep the craft head on to the waves, it must have turned broadside and capsized.

Spectators watching those currachs out on the Atlantic on a wild day with the waves running very high will see the craft high up on the crest of a wave and after a few moments it has disappeared. Landsmen looking on would think it had gone beneath the waves; but no, for after a few moments it can be seen riding on the crest of the following wave and brought safely to land by those expert oarsmen around the coast.

A few months ago a famous German-owned windjammer was wrecked in the Atlantic with the loss of many lives, as the ship carried a large number of cadets. The ship was a huge vessel

and was rigged with four very high masts, to which over thirty sails of different shape were hoisted when in full sail. This large ship was built in the early years of the century and came on a voyage to the Port of Dublin about 1907 and it was a wonderful sight to the citizens of Dublin to see masts of the ship towering as high as Nelson's Pillar. It was the first and last voyage to Dublin, and the occasion brought the writer to the quayside to visit the ship. It brought his mind back to the anchorage near the Bares Rock Lighthouse and off Low Island, where the windjammers of bygone days anchored to wait for the spring tides to reach the Port of Limerick after a long voyage from Australia. After the wreck of the German ship and the loss of so many lives, it has been suggested that no more sailing ships should be built. However, turning to the steamship, it was boasted by the engineers that the wonder ship "Titanic" was unsinkable, and yet by striking a glancing blow against an iceberg on the ship's first voyage, it sank beneath the ocean in a very short time with the fearful loss of lives which caused consternation the world over.

To-day large ships, including liners, have all sorts of safety gadgets invented by science to make their voyages in safety, and yet it is only a few weeks ago since the luxury Greek liner "Neptunia" 11,000 tons, struck the Daunts Rock with a number of passengers and a large crew on board, despite Radar, etc. An ocean tugboat, and a famous one at that, the "Turmoil," is stationed in Cork Harbour ready for the call to steamships in danger as far off as mid-Atlantic, also trawlers which get into trouble in bad weather; and yet in the bygone days of sail, the skippers and crews of sailing ships managed to get their vessels to their different ports to home and safety. Some enterprising seamen, for the purpose of making money, took a sailing ship to the Liffey over fifty years ago. The vessel was used as a prison ship to take prisoners to far-off Van Diemen's Land. The wax figures of some famous men were shown in tiny cabins in the ship, where they had to live in cruelty on such a long voyage. The instruments of torture for so-called disobedience were also shown on deck. They sailed for New York after leaving Dublin.

M.J.T. Clare Champion 4 January 1958