William Uniacke Townsend [5B01]

Extract from Lewis Topographical Dictionary 1837

KILFINANE, a market-town and parish, in the barony of COSTLEA, county of LIMERICK, and province of MUNSTER, 5 miles (E. by S.) from Kilmallock, on the road from that place to Mitchelstown; containing 4437 inhabitants, of which number, 1752 are in the town. The town is situated in the midst of a group of mountains, by which it is surrounded on all sides but the north, where it opens upon the rich vale of Kilmallock; it has a penny post to Kilmallock, and consists of two principal and several smaller streets, containing 314 houses, many of which are large and well built, and is the property of R. Oliver Gascoigne, Esq. Many Palatine families were brought hither from Rathkeale, about 1740, by the Right Hon. Silver Oliver. In 1793, the attacks made on the town by the Defenders were repelled twice, and they were ultimately defeated by the Palatines and other inhabitants, under Chas. Silver Oliver, Esq.; and at a later period, when an attack from the disaffected was anticipated, the respectable inhabitants armed themselves in defence of the place. The inhabitants are mostly engaged in agricultural occupations; a few are employed in the weaving of linen and cotton goods; and not far from the town are oatmeal-mills and others at Sunville, about two miles distant. The market is on Tuesday, and is well attended; and fairs, for farming-stock and implements, are held on May 19th, Aug. 9th, and Oct. 25th. The market-house is a large and commodious building, and was substantially repaired in 1836. Here is a constabulary police station, and petty sessions are held on alternate Saturdays. Quarter sessions were formerly held here, but have been removed to Bruff; it is, however, in contemplation to restore them. A small bridewell has recently been built; and the sessions-house, which is large and convenient, is about to be repaired. A spacious and handsome fever hospital was erected in 1836, at an expense of £700, to which an accident ward and a dispensary are attached.

The parish comprises 9340 statute acres, as applotted under the tithe act, and valued at £5679 per annum. The mountains consist principally of coarse conglomerate and red sandstone; silver and iron ores are found, and coal is supposed to exist; limestone gravel is abundant, and is much used for manure. The land is generally good, and there are large dairy farms, and a considerable tract of bog and mountain pasture; much of the mountain land, however, has been brought into cultivation, and in a great measure provides for many poor families. The principal seats are **Spa Hill**, the residence of W. Oliver, Esq.; Spring Lodge, of W. Collins, Esq.; Bossonstown, of G. W. Bennett, Esq.; Kilfinane House, of C. Bennett, Esq.; and Brookville Cottage, of T. Massey, Esq., M. D. The living is a vicarage, in the diocese of Limerick, united by act of council to the vicarage of Daragh, forming the union of Kilfinane, in the patronage of the Earl of Cork, partly in whom and partly in E. Deane Freeman, Esq., the rectory is impropriate. The tithes amount to £270, of which £105 is payable to the Earl of Cork, and the remainder to the vicar; but the rectorial tithes of Bossonstown, Bosnitstown, and Moorestown, amounting to £60, are payable to E. D. Freeman, Esq. The church was rebuilt in 1760, and is a large plain edifice. The glebe house was built in 1813, for which the late Board of First Fruits gave £400 and lent £386: the glebe comprises 4 1/2 acres. In the R. C. divisions the parish is the head of a union or district, comprising the parishes of Kilfinane, Particles, and Ardpatrick, and containing two chapels, one a large plain building at Kilfinane, erected in 1835 at an expense of £1000, and one at Ardpatrick. About 200 children are educated in two public schools. Adjoining the church are the ruins of an ancient castle, built by the Roches. Near the town are a rath and three strong forts; also a large artificial cave. Castle Oliver, which was successively occupied by the Fitz-Harrises and the Roches, and

since 1641 by the Olivers, is now in ruins. Eastward of the town is a fine sulphuro-chalybeate spring, of great efficacy in cutaneous diseases. Outside the town is "the Danes' fort," a mound about 130 feet high, 50 feet in diameter at the base, and 20 at the summit, encircled by seven earthen ramparts about 20 feet apart, gradually diminishing in height from the innermost to the outermost, which is about 10 feet high and 2000 feet in circuit: an extensive view is obtained from its summit.

‘Disturbed Ireland - Letters Written During the Winter of 1880-81’

By

Bernard H. Becker

Special Commissioner of The "Daily News."

Extract from Chapter XVII

KILFINANE, CO. LIMERICK, Christmas Eve.

I must confess that I draw a line at agents. Alone I should not dream of going about armed, although "indignation meetings" have been held to denounce me for speaking the truth and believing my own eyes, and I consider myself quite safe while in the company of many landlords. But agents are another matter. There is while with them always the off chance of something untoward turning up, and it is, perhaps, as well to be prepared for emergencies. Personally I must confess that I am favourably disposed towards the much vilified agents. They are in many respects the most manly men in Ireland. Nearly always well-bred, they excite sympathy by the position they hold between the upper and nether millstone of landlord and tenant. Perhaps they have made a good thing of it, but if so they have earned it, for their position always reminds one of that assigned by Lord Macaulay to the officers of the East India Company, such as Olive and Warren Hastings. To these founders of our Eastern Empire "John Company" said, "Respect treaties; keep faith with native rulers; do not oppress the people; but send us money."

This is exactly what easy-going Irish absentee proprietors preach--"Don't hurt my tenants; don't make my name to stink in the land; above all, let there be no evictions among my people; but send me a couple of thousand pounds before Monday, or remit me at least one thousand to Nice some time next week.--Yours, The O'Martingale." This, I take it, has been the situation for the last quarter of a century, since the younger sons of Irish families took to land agency as a profession because there seemed nothing else in Ireland for them to do. Nevertheless they are hideously unpopular, and I like to be armed when I take a stroll with them in a lonely country district.

So we walk down to Kilfinane to look after the progress made in arranging quarters for the soldiers presently expected, some fifty odd redcoats or rifles as the authorities may decide. It is instructive to observe the demeanour of the people towards us. My companion formerly lived at Kilfinane, and took his share of the work there, but he was the first of his family "Boycotted," and was obliged to take up his quarters in his uncle's house. Not a blacksmith could be found to shoe his horse, and not a living creature to cook his food; so a forge belonging to the mounted division of the Royal Irish Constabulary was sent down for the horse, and the master of that interesting animal went up to the big house to eat and sleep, and the "Boycotters" were, so far, brought to nought. But the good folk of Kilfinane eye us terribly askance, or, to be more literally exact, do not eye us at all; at least, their eyes betray

"no speculation." Had I driven in from Charleville alone I might have gossiped with all the idlers of the village, but now that I am walking with a "Boycotted" person I seem to have become invisible. A few men are on the side walks--a few women at their doors--but they either look at us as if we were transparent as panes of glass, or suddenly become interested in their boots or finger nails, both which would be better for more regular attention……

As I approach the end of my letter, it occurs to me that although the place, events, and persons described would be recognised by anybody living in the counties of Limerick, Cork, or Tipperary, this account might appear to English readers rather as an imaginative and highly-coloured picture, painted for the Christmas market from a number of models, than as a simple sketch in neutral greys as exactly and faithfully drawn as is possible to the writer. To prevent any such misapprehension, I will observe that the events which I describe as occurring before me, have all taken place within forty-eight hours in and near the house of Mr **Townsend**, of **Spa Hill, Kilfinane**, county Limerick, and are telegraphed from Limerick city to the Daily News because there was no nearer or more convenient office from which to send so long a message. Mr. **Uniacke Townsend** is one of a large family mostly engaged in land agency, and has incurred the ire of the people of Kilfinane, Kilmallock, Charleville, and the surrounding country, in consequence of a difficulty with one Murphy, a fairly large farmer according to the Irish measure of farming capacity. Murphy's farm is known as Lisheen. It includes between 40 and 50 acres, and the rent, £240. per annum, has, I am informed, not been changed for forty-six years. When Murphy owed a clear year's rent and a balance on a "broken gale," he was sued for the whole amount. By May of this year he owed another gale of half a year's rent, and he was formally evicted and a caretaker put in possession on the 21st June.

It has been explained in a previous letter that after receiving any amount of credit an Irish farmer is again allowed six months' "redemption" after eviction. After paying up everything, including the additional "gale" incurred, less the proceeds of the farm, he re-enters on possession at any time within the margin of six months. Thus another "gale" fell due in November, and Murphy was still unprovided with funds. He did, however, very well without them; for the Land League, having become strong in the meanwhile in county Limerick, the caretaker was frightened away from the farm and Murphy reinstated. Mr. **Uniacke Townsend** requested him to give up possession, and was refused, and it then became known that Murphy might expect imprisonment or fine for trespass. Thereat a meeting was held, and Mr. **Townsend** solemnly adjudged worthy of "Boycotting." The lead in these disgraceful proceedings was taken by a Father Sheehy.

Whatever the merits of Murphy's case may be, and it seems that members of his family have held Lisheen for some considerable time, there is no doubt that Father Sheehy made an almost frantic speech against Mr. **Townsend**, the agent, and Mr. Coote, the owner of the property, declaring that "the very name of Coote smelt of blood." I am not aware of the sanguinary deeds of the Cootes in the past; all I know of them is that the present incumbent is a very old man, of somewhat clerical exterior, who, like "A fine old Irish gentleman, one of the olden time," lives in London, requests his agent to enforce the law against his tenants without delay, and, in order to encourage him to do his duty, sends down to Spa-hill the very best repeating rifles that money can buy.

The upshot of the matter is that Mr. **Townsend** has been so threatened that he has yielded to the entreaties of his family and left Kilfinane for a week or two, at any rate. He is, however, like most of his profession, a very determined man, and declared that he would come home

and eat his Christmas dinner in his own house, "despite of foes;" but Mrs. **Townsend**, who, like the lady to whom I referred in a previous letter, has borne up nobly under her severe trial, was so scared at the thought of her husband's coming among a population banded together against him that she set off on Saturday and joined him, as the only way of averting some terrible disaster; for there is little doubt that the law will be put in force against Murphy now that his six months for "redemption" have expired; and nobody can tell what will happen at Lisheen any more than at Ennistymon if writs are issued against the tenants on the Macnamara estate, or on Mr. Stacpoole's property, if he perseveres in his resolution to "Dublin writ" the people with whom he has to deal.

So the family at Spa-hill is broken up this Christmas; father and mother are both away--where I should hardly divulge, but assuredly where their Christmastide will be passed peacefully, if not joyfully.

Another gentleman of these parts is being severely "Boycotted," to wit **Mr. T. Sanders of Sanders Park** [1], Charleville, county Cork, just over the border from county Limerick; the Mr. Sanders, in fact, whom I saw the Palladians roaring and yelling at on the occasion of my first visit to the classic battlefield of the "three and four year olds." On that occasion he had been vainly trying to get in rents for the charitable bequest known as Erasmus Smith's Schools, and Pallas was full of noisy and more or less drunken Palladians, who dealt with Mr. Sanders in such wise that the police were obliged to see him into a railway carriage, and stand by the door till the train moved on. I would fain have called upon Mr. Sanders as I drove to Charleville, but the civil and obliging landlord of Lincoln's Hotel at that place, who supplied me with an excellent carriage and horses, politely apologised for his inability to drive me thither. He could not possibly enter Sanders Park, nor would any of his men go near that abhorred spot. No orders concerning Spa-hill had been issued by the "Real Government" in the absence of the hated head of the house, and I might be driven there and welcome; but Sanders Park was another matter. I [326]might walk out of the town, and across the park if I liked, and my informant would ensure that I went and returned in safety, as for that matter I knew very well; but not being fond of walking against time through the mud, I preferred going whither I could be driven in comfort. Moreover, the novelty of the thing is wearing off, and "Boycotting" is now only interesting when ingeniously evaded or boldly defied.

[1] Thomas Sanders whose third son married Maria Elizabeth Coote Townsend [5B36] 16 October 1903.

Mount Jerome Cemetery, Dublin



