

House Type.

The typical peasant dwelling in this part of the mainland of Mayo is entirely different from the houses of Achill. The older houses on Achill Island were mainly one roomed structures and possibly this may have been the case here too, but if so none has survived. The house here is almost invariably of 3 rooms - the kitchen which is the largest, a bedroom at the lower end, and a "room" or sort of parlour at the upper end behind the fireplace of the kitchen. This parlour is often also pressed into service (when the family is large) as a bed room.

The strikingly different feature between these houses and those of Achill is the presence of what is called the "Outshot" or in Irish "Casteri". This is a shallow projecting recess beside the kitchen fire in which is placed a bed in which the parents sleep while the children occupy the two rooms. This "outshot" is a fairly typical feature of the houses of Galway, Mayo, Donegal and the north generally around as far as Co. Derry. It is paralleled by the "half-neck" beds of the Orkney and Faroe Islands and the wall beds of the Hebridean "Black Houses". The reason for building the projection is so that a large bed 6' x 4" can have its traditional place beside the fire without unduly crowding the space around the hearth where most of the domestic activity takes place. (See Evans: Irish Heritage, (1942), 58, 60 etc.).

As in Achill, the gables here are stepped and for the same reason, but the ends of the vertical ropes holding the thatch are not weighted down with stones but tied in to pegs on the face of the wall or to a thin iron bar which is pegged with "scallops" (made from split withies) to the lower edge of the roof.

There are rarely if ever any windows on the back of the house and those on the front are miserably small often not exceeding 1 foot square. There is always a chimney and this is never at the gable end. The hearth is a simple narrow opening in the wall and the pot suspender is a very simple iron cast. Roof construction is almost identical with the Achill method except in the one particular mentioned above. Walls are of stone with a heavy coat of plaster both inside and out. (See Fig. 6.)

① Treatment of Consumptives. This is a local treatment called "lifting the Cléirin" and is still practised. There is a local belief that T.B. of the lungs is caused by the sinking in of the sternum (or breast bone) and the treatment consists in lifting this and thereby releasing the pressure on the lungs and so relieving the sufferer. It is claimed that the treatment will bring about a complete cure. The method is as follows: a small amount of dough is made from wheat flour, sometimes mixed with water and sometimes with milk. The soft dough is flattened out into a disc about 6" in diam. The sufferer's chest is then bared and the disc of dough placed over the hollow part at the base of the sternum. Five or 6 tiny splints of bog-oak are then stuck into the dough and their projecting ends are lighted. A glass tumbler is then placed suddenly mouth downward over the lighted splints and pressed firmly into the dough. The splints burn till the oxygen inside the glass is consumed. When this has happened, atmospheric pressure outside the glass is much greater than the pressure within so that the soft flesh and cartilage of the patient's chest is sucked upward into the glass. The operator then puts his hand on the glass, which, owing to the difference in pressures sticks firmly to the chest. As he continues to pull the whole chest is lifted. The patient undergoes a long course of this treatment during which the "operation" is performed usually twice a day, morning and evening till he is either cured or dies. However, there is great local faith in the remedy and it is still practised. The reason for using the dough is two-fold. Firstly it provides something into which the tapers can be fixed and secondly it ensures an air-tight contact between the edge of the glass and the patient's chest.

② Cure for sprained joints. - Immediately anyone becomes disabled thro' spraining his ankle, wrist, thumb or other joint, he is taken off to either a weaver or the local "medicine man" who will make what is called a "spraining Thread". This is merely two lengths of ordinary home spun woolen thread which are twisted together to form a single thick thread. Either the weaver or the "medicine man" which ever of them has made it, then ties loosely a length of this thread around the sprained joint. It is believed that this will cause the swelling to go down almost immediately and that the joint will rapidly recover. This also is still practised.

③ Cure for headaches, Meningitis etc.

Undergoing this cure is called "having your head measured." If a person is suffering from headaches, "Water in the brain" (meningitis), concussion or any other affliction of the head he goes to the "medicine man" or the medicine man is brought if the patient can't travel and a length of "spraining thread" as above described is made. The medicine man then ties this around the patient's head reciting the following prayer-incantation at the same time:

"Óría far Peadar,  
Óría far Pól,  
Óría far Yádrac óy Róis.  
Óría far Mure arú Ruiry 're h-órj  
Cúy szreos agus díbrer a cur ar ay y gearr-zalra.  
zój suas do dá íoráin  
Mar zójcas Mure a dá láin. Amén."

When this is completed the cure begins at once, but the thread is left in position for several days maybe till the patient is fully recovered. The word "Óría" is probably some sort of Irish corruption of the Latin "Orate", but it is difficult to know what the word "far" comes from. It may possibly be some old Irish survival.

④ Use of the Fox Tongue. - When a fox is killed his tongue is immediately cut out and stretched by pinning on to a piece of wood. It is then placed in hot sun light till it becomes dried and hard. It is kept then for future use. Its uses are very numerous but the following are a few of the chief ones. (a) ~~If a man gets a thorn in his hand or foot or anywhere on the body~~ <sup>To extract a thorn the</sup> the fox's tongue is laid over the spot and a bandage put on to hold it in place. It is said that the tongue very quickly draws out the thorn and prevents possibility of festering or any kind of poisoning. (b) It is used similarly on a blistered heel or toe and is said to be very effective in removing immediate discomfort and in removing the blisters. (c) In any case where a cut or abrasion is slow in healing. The tongue is applied as before and held in place with a bandage. The wound immediately begins to heal. The tongue is used in almost any case of this nature. The practice still continues.

⑤ Cure for Ring worm - When a seventh son is born a piece of clay is taken and laid in his little palm and the fingers

closed over it for a few moments. If this is done that son when he grows up will have the power of curing all forms of ring-worm. When the patient goes to the seventh son, this man takes up a little clay and spreads it over the affected part with his fingers. He then breathes on the clay & into the patient's mouth. This brings about an instantaneous cure it is said. If when the 7th son was born the clay was not put in his hand he will have no such powers.

Cure for Cattle diseases. - When cattle are found to have any disease some prehistoric flint arrowheads are procured. (Many houses kept a supply of these which had been found by chance during tillage operations etc). Three or four of them are placed in a bucket of water some of which is sprinkled over the animal and the stable. What remains is then given to the beast to drink. This was held to be a very effective cure. When the animal became ill it was thought ~~it~~<sup>it</sup> was "elf-shot", that is that the fairies had shot their darts into it. Then by procuring the arrowheads, which were believed to have been lost by the fairies, and treating the animal as above described, the fairies' spell was broken and the recovery followed immediately. The practice was now scarce but I have seen in this parish arrowheads which had been used in this cure the quite recent years.

### Querns or Hand-mills

There are some houses still in this ph. which have continued to use the old hand querns for producing oat-meal and flour. In the days of potato much of that spirit was made here and in making it, it was felt necessary to partially crush the grain and the only way of doing this without being detected was with the hand-mill. It is probably due to this fact that the use of the mill has lived on in this district. Now that potato is ~~no~~ no more in this ph. the querns are used to produce oatmeal for porridge and wheaten flour. The querns are invariably of red sandstone of which there is a plentiful supply which can be fairly easily made into querns stones. Usually the stones are 3 to 4 inches in ~~the~~ thickness and 1' 6" in diam.

Parish of Burrishoole, Co. Mayo.

A local treatment for consumption - called "lifting the cléicín" - is still practised. It is based on a belief that T.B. of the lungs is caused by the sinking of the sternum (or breast<sup>bone</sup>). The treatment consists in lifting this and thereby releasing the pressure on the lungs and so relieving the sufferer. It is claimed that the treatment will bring about a complete cure. The method is as follows:- A small amount of dough is made from wheaten flour mixed with water or milk. The soft dough is flattened out into a disc about 6" in diam. The victim's chest is then bared and the disc of dough placed over the hollow just at the base of the sternum. Five or six tiny splints of bog deal are then stuck into the dough and their projecting ends are lighted. A glass tumbler is then placed suddenly mouth downward over the lighted splints and pressed firmly into the dough. The splints burn till the oxygen inside the glass is consumed. When this has happened the atmospheric pressure outside the glass is much greater than the pressure within, so that the soft flesh and cartilage of the patient's chest is sucked upward into the glass. The operator then pulls hard on the glass, which - owing to the difference in pressures sticks firmly to the chest. As he continues to pull, the whole chest is lifted. The patient undergoes a long course of this treatment, during which the "operation" is performed usually twice a day, morning and evening, ~~the~~ till he is either cured or dies. However, there is a great local faith in the remedy. The reason for using the dough is two-fold. Firstly, it provides something into which the tapes can be fixed; and it also ensures an air-tight contact between the edge of the glass and the patient's chest.

Use of the Fox Tongue :- When a fox is killed his tongue is immediately cut out and stretched by pinning on to a piece of wood. It is then placed in hot sunlight till it becomes dried and hard, and is afterwards put away for future use. Its uses are numerous, but the following are some of the chief ones:- (A.) If a man gets a thorn in his hand or foot, or anywhere on the body, the fox's tongue is laid over the spot and a bandage put on to hold it in place. It is said that the tongue very quickly draws out the thorn and prevents possibility of festering or any kind of poisoning. (B.) It is similarly used on a blistered heel or toe and is said to be very effective in relieving immediately any discomfort and removing the blister. (C.) In any case where a cut or abrasion is slow in healing. The tongue is applied as before and held in place with a bandage. The wound immediately begins to heal. The tongue is used in almost any case of this nature; these cures are still resorted to.

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(For prayer see p. 3)

"Ória far Peadar,  
 Ória far Pól,  
 Ória far Pádraic ón Róin.  
 Ória far Mure scá Rian, na h-óig  
 Cú, Sgrios 7 Dibre a cú SR on ngearr-galra.  
 Tóig suas do dá cnamh  
 Mar tóigeas Mure a dá Láim. Amen."

When this is completed the cure begins at once, but the thread is left in position for several days, perhaps, until the patient is fully recovered. The word "Ória" is probably an Irish corruption of the Latin "Orate."

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