

Lesson 11

Ireland

The “Emerald Isle” is the most westerly of the British Isles. It owes this pretty and fanciful title to the fact that the grass is always green, or, at any rate, it has seldom the parched and brown look of English grass in a dry season. Ireland has always plenty of rain, because the west winds that blow off the Atlantic are full of watery vapour, which comes down in frequent showers; and these cause the verdant appearance for which the country is famous.

For the same reason, more rain falls in the western counties of England than in the eastern; and because moist air never becomes quite so cold as dry air, Ireland, and the western counties of England, are, on the whole, warmer than the eastern counties.

As a moist soil is good for grass, there are many pasture fields all over the country, and great numbers of cattle are fed; much of the butter made from their milk is exported to England and America, but also to several countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa. There is not much corn grown, partly because the soil is less suitable for corn than for grass and root-tubers. Potatoes were formerly the chief food of the people; failures in this crop were followed by frightful famines, causing more than a third of the people to emigrate—dearly as they loved their native land—to find work and wages in America or Australia. Today a variety of barley, sugar beets, potatoes, wheat, and oats are grown.

You would think that because historically things have often gone badly for them, the Irish must be a sad and gloomy people; but, on the contrary, they are light-hearted and full of fun and jokes, excepting when trouble is pressuring upon them. They are not a Saxon people like the English, but are Celts, allied to the ancient Britons and to the Welsh of the present day. Most of the people speak English, however, for some portion of Ireland has belonged to England for about eight centuries.

The people of Ulster, the northern province of Ireland, are partly of Saxon descent. King James I. of England settled a colony of Lowland Scots here, from whom many of the present inhabitants are descended; and they have made this north-eastern corner the richest and most prosperous part of the island. Ulster is made up of nine counties: six of these constitute Northern Ireland; the remaining three are in the Republic of Ireland (officially named Ireland.)

A war of independence in the early 20th century was followed by the partition of the island, creating the Republic of Ireland in the south, which became increasingly sovereign over the following decades, and Northern Ireland, which remained a part of the United Kingdom. Since partition Northern Ireland has seen much civil unrest. Nationalists or republicans, who are mainly Catholic, believe the north should join a united, independent Ireland. Unionists or loyalists, who are often Protestant, think Northern Ireland should stay as part of the United

Kingdom. The worst of the unrest is a period known as 'The Troubles', which began in the late 1960s and lasted for nearly 30 years.

Part II

The cliffs on the coast of Antrim—the county in which Belfast is situated—are very remarkable. They are made of a rock called basalt, which is dark and hard, and heavy as iron; and these hard rocks have been worn by the waves into columns that look as if they had been carved by human hands. The cliffs of Fair Head are 600 feet high; but the great wonder of this coast is the Giant's Causeway. This curious pier stretches for a thousand feet into the sea, and is made of many five- or six-sided columns, packed close together, fitting in with one another perfectly, and more even and regular than man could make them.

Lough Neagh, in Antrim, is the largest lake in Ireland, and, indeed, in the British Isles; the eels in the lough are caught when they are about a meter long and transported live to markets in Britain and the Continent.

Ireland has a good many lakes, which are called *loughs* here, while in Scotland they are termed lochs. There are three large loughs, Allen, Ree, and Dearg, in the course of the Shannon, which is the largest of the Irish rivers. The seaport town of Limerick stands at its mouth.

Off the coast of County Kerry, at the southwest corner of the island, two islands can be seen. The larger of the two, Skellig Michael, hosts an ancient monastery at its summit, which can only be reached by climbing hundreds of stone steps, hand-carved into the rock. Here are also the three famous lakes of Killarney, on whose wooded banks the arbutus grows freely; the lakes are studded with fairy isles, and are hemmed in by mountains, in some places rugged and awful, in others clothed with trees and grass. The other two counties of Ireland which are remarkable for their scenery are Galway, in the west, which is wild and much broken into by the sea; and Wicklow on the east, which has hills and lovely river valleys. The stretch of coast between Tramore and Dungarvan in County Waterford is known as the Copper Coast, named after the historic metal-mining industry.

You will notice that these four *picturesque* counties—that is, counties where hill, valley, and water make pictures pleasant to the eye—are all upon the sea-coast.

Carry your eye round the map of Ireland, and you will see there are various other mountain ranges near the coast; you can count six or more distinct chains, while, running inland, there are only the Slieve Bloom and Silvermines Mountains, which reach as far as King's County. None of these mountain ranges are high, and they are usually covered to the top with grass, upon which sheep and cattle feed.

The middle of Ireland is a wide plain; it is rather high and in some places hilly, and yet it consists for the most part of soaking *bogs* which cover more than a third of the country. They

form a dreary waste where the ground is filled with stagnant water. The largest of these wastes is the Bog of Allen.

Starting in the 1700s, the raised bogs of Ireland were used as a source of fuel. There is not much coal in Ireland, and what there is, is not of a good kind; and there are very few trees indeed, so the people cannot use wood for fuel. Therefore, they cut sods from the bogs and piled them in stacks to dry; and these peat sods, which burn with a peculiar smell, are what the peasants made their fires of. In recent years, there has been increased awareness of the importance of raised bogs to science. In the Republic of Ireland, there are plans to set aside 10,000 hectares (almost 25,000 acres) of raised bog for conservation purposes. In Northern Ireland, which has less raised bog to begin with, almost all raised bogs are being preserved as Areas of Special Scientific Interest.

Until the mid-1900s, most of the remaining inhabitants of Ireland were still engaged in tilling the ground, and there were but few large towns. In the last few years of that century, however, the Irish economy boomed, when most of the top ten largest computing technology companies moved to cities such as Dublin, including Facebook, Google, eBay, Amazon, LinkedIn, Twitter, Paypal, and Microsoft. As well, Ireland is among the largest exporter of software-related goods, medical devices, and pharmaceuticals. The country is also the largest producer of zinc and the second-largest producer of lead in Europe. After a long history of poverty and trial, Ireland is now one of the richest countries in the world.

Maps

[Map of the Republic of Ireland](#)

[Map of Northern Ireland](#)

[Political Map](#)

Map Questions

1. Name several peninsulas round the coast of Ireland, and three or four bays. (Iveragh, Beara and Dingle; Dundalk, Dublin, Dingle, Galway, Donagel)
2. Where are the mountains of Ireland, near the coast, or in the interior? Name any mountain-chains. (mostly near the coast; starting near Dublin and working clockwise: Wicklow, Blackstairs, Comeragh, Macgillycuddy's Reeks, Slieve Mish, Twelve Pins, Nephin Beg, Ox, Bluestack, Derryveagh, and on the interior: Silvermines, Slieve Bloom. In Northern Ireland there are Sperrin and Mourne)
3. Name several of the largest rivers of Ireland. (Shannon, Barrow, Blackwater, Boyne, Finn, Lee, Liffey, Nore, Slaney and Suir. In Northern Ireland there are Bann, Foyle, Logan, and Mourne)
4. What river flows from the Republic of Ireland into the Irish Sea. (The River Liffey)
5. Name the largest lake (lough) in Ireland? (Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland.)
6. What other lakes can you find? (Conn, Corrib and Mask. In Northern Ireland the Lower and Upper Lough Erne)
7. Name the lakes formed in the course of the Shannon. What seaport town stands at the mouth of the Shannon? (Lough Allen, Lough Bafin, Lough Derg and Lough Ree; Limerick)
8. What Bog occupies much of the centre of Ireland? (Bog of Allen — between the rivers Liffey and Shannon)
9. Name half-a-dozen seaport town