

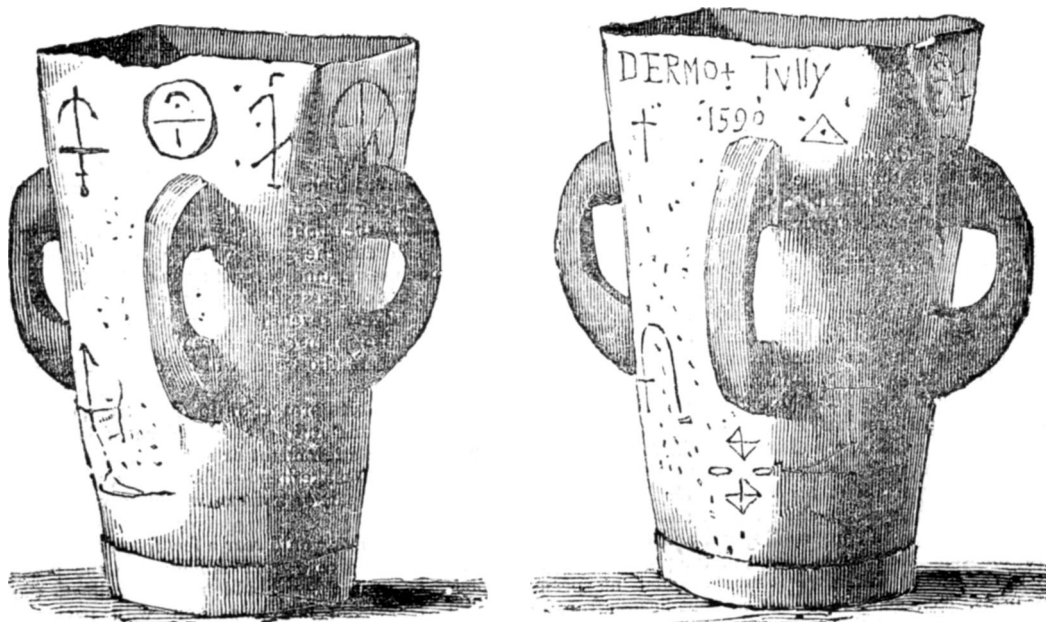
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THE IRISH METHER.

Your ingenious correspondent "P;" furnished on a former occasion, a drawing of one of the ancient Irish drinking vessels called "Methers." Having now in my possession one of the same kind bearing an inscription and exhibiting many curious carvings, I send you the foregoing two sketches of it for insertion in your Journal.

The size, dimensions, and contents of this Mether exceed those described by "P." Its height is eight inches three quarters; its circumference round the top eighteen inches, and its contents exceed two quarts. The material of which it is made appears to be solid crabtree excavated, so as to form a circle towards the bottom, while the upper part is perfectly square; on each side is a handle with hieroglyphic carvings, not intelligible; and on one side is the inscription, "Dermot Tully, 1590." This inscription is evidently much later than the making of the Mether itself, and only shews it was in the possession of Dermot Tully in the year 1590. Who this person was, I have not yet accurately ascertained: but on making enquiry of the officer who has charge of the chancery muniments relating to all the family estates, he most kindly and politely showed me that there once existed a family named Tully, in the county of Roscommon, of considerable estate and respectability, and who retained their property there until long after that period.

The appearance and contents of the vessel are sufficient to satisfy us that it never was intended for that liquid fire (whiskey) which cannot be taken draughtwise, and which even the most seasoned of its admirers can only use in measured proportions. No; the Mether was intended for the rich wines, foaming ales, and other generous drinks which were used in Ireland long before whiskey had been known to its natives. That wines, ales, and such wholesome drinks were used by the people, and that whiskey is really a spirit of comparatively modern invention,

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may be a matter of surprise now a days to some, yet decidedly they are at the same time facts most easily shown. I have seen in the manuscripts of a gentleman who was pleased to throw them open to my enquiries on this subject, a parliamentary proceeding regulating the sale of wines in Ireland so far back as the year 1269; afterwards wines continued cheap and were generally used by the inhabitants, and in the year 1545, when the mayor of Drogheda was fined for selling wines by retail in a tavern, contrary to the act of parliament prohibiting mayors from selling wines during their mayoralty, we find he had sold 8 hogsheads of sack, value only 100 SHILLINGS each hogshead; and 2 hogsheads of Gascony wines, value FOUR POUNDS EACH HOGSHEAD, all by retail, and during one year only. In fact, it was not until 1569, that any tax or duty was imposed upon wines coming into Ireland, and the very reason given then by parliament for imposing this duty, most fully shows its general use amongst all classes of the inhabitants: "because by the superfluous abundance of wines that are yearly discharged within this realm, grievous decay of tillage and husbandry, and idleness, the mother of all vices, have been perniciously bred and nourished. To check this a duty was made payable to queen Elizabeth upon all wines imported, but this duty was moderate, and left wine still within the reach of the least affluent, until within the last fifty years, when tax being heaped upon tax, the drinking of wine was almost prohibited; and now, except amongst the most affluent, it is become generally disused.

Ale, beer, mead, &c., were in almost universal use from the earliest period in Ireland. On reference to the "Monasticon," published by the Rev. Mervyn Archdall, it will be seen that so early as the year 1185, Prince John endowed Thomascourt Abbey, in our city, with the toll of beer and mead, payable out of several places in Dublin.—Mr. Archdall also, in giving the agreement between the prior of the house of St. John's of Jerusalem, the site of

the late royal hospital) and Walter Istelep, who was about entering into the priory for life, particularly mentions that when he was to dine with the prior in the public hall, it was stipulated this Walter was to sit on the prior's right hand, and was to have for his "evening potation" three *flaggons of the best ale*, but when he dined separately in his own suite of chambers he was to have *ten flaggons of the best ale*. Let it be observed that these ales, &c., were not as now, the produce of public breweries,—no such establishments then existed. Each family had its own brewery, and thus possessed one source of domestic economy and employment within itself. Nor was this confined to the wealthier classes, for even the very poorest description of people brewed their own drink heretofore in Ireland; and in the list of those who paid to the crown the old custom called the "Mary Gallon," being one gallon of ale for every brewing, I have seen tanners, bakers, *fishermen, husbandmen, and even labourers*, regularly entered, as brewing their own malt drink. In the course of time, however, an accumulating body of excise laws and regulations discouraged this; the private brew-house gradually disappeared, and it would be difficult now to name any district in the kingdom where private families continue still to brew.

Aqua Vitæ, or whiskey, that bad substitute for all that was generous, wholesome, and good, is but of comparatively recent introduction or invention. Whiskey in the middle of the sixteenth century (and the fact is now undeniable) was found to be made amongst the English settlements in Ireland for supplying to the native Irish.—Queen Mary was the first who endeavoured to check this evil, and the parliamentary enactments then made, describe whiskey to be a drink, "*nothing profitable to be used, and drunken*, is now universally, throughout this realm of Ireland, made especially in the borders of the *Irishry*, and for the furniture of *Irishmen*, and thereby much corn, grain, and other things are consumed, spent, and wasted; to the great hindrance, loss, and damage, of the poor inhabitants of the realm:" wherefore it was ordered no person but peers, &c., should make it without license from government. The restrictive or licensing power, thus through the best motives vested in the crown, was afterwards turned to good account by James the First, who rewarded his favourites (most of them noblemen, as will be seen in Mr. Lodge's work), by licenses to *make aqua vitæ*, and to *keep public houses* for sale thereof. But this system of licensing proved so profitable at length, that whiskey-selling became one of the regular items of the excise revenue, and so continues to the present day.

I never view the Mether, believe me, without melancholy reflections. I look on it as a surviving testimony of that lamentable change in the national beverage which I have above described; and convinced that whiskey is that "furniture" which debases the mind, the domestic habits and morals of a nation, I hope I may live to see it again prohibited, and to witness a foaming or sparkling Mether on each man's table.

I will now only add what may be useful when that day arrives, namely, that to drink out of the Mether, you must apply one of the four corners, and not the side to your mouth. When Lord Townshend left the vice-royalty of Ireland, he had two massive silver methers made in London, where they were regularly introduced at his dinner parties; the guests most usually applied the side of the vessel to the mouth, and seldom escaped with a dry neck-cloth, vest, or *doublet*; Lord Townshend, however, after enjoying the mistake, usually called on his friend, the late Colonel O'Reilly, (afterwards Sir Hugh Nugent, by the king's sign manual) to teach the drill, and *handle the mether in true Irish style*. I am Sir, &c.,

Henry-street.

W. A.—N.

USEFUL HINTS AND EXPERIMENTS.

ON PLANTING FOREST AND FRUIT-TREES, POTATOES, &c.

Sir—Having lately read in one of the numbers of the Dublin Penny Journal an advice respecting the utility of planting woods in Ireland, in which I fully agree, especially on mountains, or if on the low lands, in broad belts around

the farm, or at least on the west side, I will venture an opinion on the most proper trees to plant, viz:—oak, larch, ash, elm, sycamore and horse-chestnut; as for the other kind of forest trees, they are mere thrash: now the proportion in every one hundred trees that would be planted, should be two oaks, fifty larch, twenty-five of ash, fifteen elms, four sycamore, and four horse chestnuts: they should be planted in regular rows, three feet asunder, and the same distance in each row; one acre of Irish plantation measure will contain seven thousand eight hundred and forty trees. The first thinning may take place about twenty years after they are planted; every alternate row should be cut out, except the oaks, and these should be planted far asunder. This thinning will give three thousand nine hundred and twenty trees, which if sold at six pence per tree, will produce the sum of ninety-eight pounds sterling, which would be nearly five pounds per annum for the acre of land on which they grew; the remainder will certainly pay for the cost of all the trees, planting, and interest of money, &c.

The reason which I will give for planting trees in regular rows is, a cart can be brought through woods so planted, whereby the timber can be carried off easier; besides a man can cut the grass which will grow between the trees much easier, and carry it away on his back or that of a horse, which grass will feed cattle in houses during the summer. Every seventh tree in the first row should be an oak, and also in every seventh row, so that in the course of years the wood will be composed of oak trees only.

In order to give protection to forest trees, every gentleman and farmer should enclose a piece of land, and plant it with osiers; a few might be allowed to grow so strong as would be fit to make handles for shovels, forks, rakes, &c.—the marshy part of a farm would answer this purpose best.

If every farmer would rear a few forest trees in his garden, it would give a great stimulus to the planting of woods, even if they should plant seedlings, the cost would be small, in comparison with paying several pounds for well grown trees. There would also be another advantage, the trees reared on a farm would grow much better than those reared in a regular nursery and good soil, not taking into consideration the probable difference as to situation of country; particularly if the farm is on mountain, and the trees reared on the lowland, and which generally is the case. Trees when registered becomes the tenant's property.

Having read of a new method of propagating fruit-trees, without the labour or delay of sowing the quinces, &c., accordingly, on the 6th of February last, I stuck into whole potatoes, (as was recommended) proper grafts of apple-trees, pears, apricots, and cherries; I then placed the potatoes in a drill, and put the usual covering of earth upon them. The result has been, I had a crop of potatoes but not fruit trees.

On the 5th of April last, I planted Bangor potatoes (also without cutting them) in holes three feet apart, and in order to mark the places, I stuck into the earth shoots of last year's growth, of pears, apricots, and cherries; also apples, none of which shoots took root, although some of them threw out small leaves.

Most of the Bangor potatoes rotted, and such of them as did grow, were, in the course of the summer, cut off by slugs, the clay which I heaped round them formed cones, and also gave protection to these slugs.

Since I have mentioned Bangor potatoes, allow me to state a few reasons formed by Gardeners, &c.; why they rot so frequently, even when planted in beds, (by some called lazy-beds) having stable manure laid under them and the furrows so deep as to carry off all water: First, by reason of bruises received on board ship from Cumberland; second, bruises received on board ship, and then impregnated with sea-water; third, that they are taken out of the ground before they are ripe; fourth, that frost is allowed to come at them. It is very probable that some or all of the above conjectures are correct; it would be well if the true reason was discovered and prevented.

With regard to manure, allow me to mention an idea that occurred to me recently respecting that invaluable ar-