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TOURING IN IRELAND  
towards the end of the Eighteenth Century

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A TOUR IN IRELAND

WITH GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE  
PRESENT STATE OF THAT KINGDOM  
MADE IN THE YEARS 1776, 1777 AND 1778

BY

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*A Short History of Ireland, Irish History  
from Contemporary Sources,  
etc.*

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## NOTE

ARTHUR YOUNG'S *Tour in Ireland* first appeared in London in 1780. As all subsequent editions are now out of print, it is hoped that the following selection may be acceptable to the general reader, although the student of agriculture will naturally wish to consult a complete edition.

Arthur Young was not particular as to the spelling of names of persons and places, and often wrote these down as he heard them pronounced. Most of the names have therefore been corrected. In cases where the author's spelling approximates to the usual form, a change has been affected without comment, but where there is a marked difference, the correct form in square brackets has been added. In those few instances where identification has been impossible, Arthur Young's own spelling is given in inverted commas.

The frontispiece is taken from the first edition of the *Post-Chaise Companion* published in Dublin 1786. The illustration facing p. 84 is from a drawing made by Arthur Young which was included in the first edition of the *Tour*; that facing p. 204 is one of Tudor's *Six Views of Dublin* published in 1753.

For a list of books on Irish history at this time, the reader is referred to the *Cambridge Modern History* (vi, 913–24) and to the footnotes in Lecky's *History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* and in Dr O'Brien's *Economic History of Ireland* for the same period.

C. M.

DUBLIN,

September, 1925.

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## ARTHUR YOUNG

### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE

ARTHUR YOUNG, the son of a Suffolk clergyman, was born in 1741. He first applied himself to agriculture in 1763. Although an excellent theorist, he was an unsuccessful farmer, and was so often in financial straits, that he had serious thoughts at one time of emigrating to America. He made his mark through his writings. His *Farmer's Letters to the People of England* appeared in 1767, and his *English Tours* between 1768 and 1771. He published his *Political Arithmetic* in 1774 and commenced the *Annals of Agriculture* in 1784. In 1792 appeared his celebrated *Travels in France*, which was followed by *The Example of France a Warning to Britain* (1793). He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1774, and when Pitt created the Board of Agriculture in 1793, he was appointed to act as Secretary. He was elected a member of most of the noted European agricultural societies, and his works were translated into several languages. Arthur Young, who is one of the greatest of English writers on agriculture, died in London in 1820.

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

**D**URING the greater part of the eighteenth century there were four main obstacles to a healthy economic development in Ireland. The country was dominated by an alien landlord class; the Parliament was subordinate to that of England; Ireland was restricted in commercial matters, and the bulk of her population being Roman Catholic was bound down by the Penal Laws.

After the Cromwellian and the Williamite wars a large part of the soil was granted to English landlords, who had little sympathy with a tenantry differing from them in national outlook and religion. Many of them were absentees in England, spent their profits there, and managed their estates through middlemen who rack-rented the occupiers; those who remained either tended to listlessness or exploited the advantages of their position as a dominant class to the uttermost. As for the Parliament, not only was it hampered by outside control, but it was an unrepresentative and a corrupt body. Roman Catholics and Dissenters were excluded, and through wire pulling, borough influence and bribery the Government was able to direct its policy. In the seventeenth century, Ireland had a flourishing cattle and wool trade. Both of these were destroyed in the interests of English merchants. Ireland was not permitted to trade with the colonies, and many of her minor industries were suppressed. The people had few healthy outlets for their energies, and in consequence numbers emigrated or were forced to subsist in poverty upon the soil. This unsatisfactory condition was aggravated by the operation of the Penal Laws, which not only excluded Roman Catholics from all civil and military offices and from adequate educational facilities, but prevented them from holding

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land on the same terms as Protestants and militated against the acquisition by them of property and capital.

During the last quarter of the century, however, there was a marked improvement. Several of the landlords abolished the middleman system and resumed direct control over their estates. Many introduced new methods of agriculture and cattle breeding from England, drained bogs, planted trees, and encouraged the tenantry to take an interest in their holdings. A Patriot Party, under the leadership of Grattan, was formed in the Irish Parliament, and owing to its efforts and to the spirit of tolerance induced in England by recent happenings in America, legislative independence was conceded to Ireland in 1782. Grattan's Parliament was not an ideal body, for it was merely representative of a small minority and like former parliaments was corrupt, but it devoted its energies to the development of the country, and by an enlightened economic policy produced that marked prosperity which characterised Ireland before the Union. Owing to a change in economic opinion and to the threat conveyed to the Government by the organisation of a large body of National Volunteers, most of the trading restrictions were removed at about the same time. The growth of eighteenth century tolerance gained alleviation for the Roman Catholics, and the relaxation of the Penal Code bore fruit in an increased spirit of enterprise and industry among the people.

It has been the fashion to give all the credit to Grattan's Parliament for this improvement in Irish conditions. As a matter of fact, the turn in the tide of Irish prosperity actually dates from about the year 1750. Except for a period of depression, caused by the non-importation agreements in America, the linen trade, unrestricted by Government and fostered by the Irish Parliament, increased steadily in volume from this time, while the encouragement given by the Pre-Grattan Parliament to tillage by a policy



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of corn bounties led to a revival of agriculture. The Provision Trade benefited greatly from the cessation of civil war, and being one of the few industries that was free from Government control soon reached a flourishing condition. A considerable amount of wool was worked up in the country for home consumption, and large quantities of raw material were smuggled abroad. It is true that the agricultural labourer and the small tenant remained miserably poor, but the landlords were rich, to judge by the fine houses that they began to build in Dublin and the country, while in the ports a wealthy trading class was rising, and the outward aspect of Irish towns was being transformed. The end of the century was a period of high prices, rising rents, and a rapidly growing population.

Arthur Young determined to make a tour in Ireland in 1776. He seems to have heard a good deal about the country from Lord Shelburne and others, and he wished to satisfy his ever-growing curiosity in agricultural matters. He was admirably fitted to act as an observer of Irish conditions. Unlike Dr Twiss who came to Ireland in 1775 and was afraid to enter Connacht because he heard that there were neither roads nor inns there, and that it was inhabited by savages, Young showed no reluctance to penetrate into the most remote places and did not shirk the discomforts of travelling in an age and in a country where these were numerous. He was already an agriculturist of European repute and had no difficulty in securing introductions from Burke and other Irishmen resident in England, or in getting into touch with the Viceroy and the most prominent members of the Irish aristocracy and gentry. His spirit of enquiry was that of the scientific observer. He systematically covered a large area of country and wrote down in his note book all that he saw and heard. Not indiscriminately however, for he never made a note without first revolving the matter in his own

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mind; moreover, “where my intelligence was received from a company of gentlemen,” he tells us, “I always waited for their settling among themselves any difference of opinion before I entered the minute, and if they did not agree took the average of the sums or quantities in question.” Sometimes he asked that “small farmers” should be present to assist at these consultations held for his benefit, and he adds that he neglected no opportunities of making enquiries of the cottagers also and examining with his own eyes their situation and manner of living. Most travellers to Ireland at this time were content either to indulge in a sentimental arithmetic of their own, or to take figures and details on hearsay. Not so Arthur Young; when the tour was over he went to Dublin and stayed there for nine weeks, employing himself with great industry in examining and transcribing public records and accounts relating to trade and manufactures, being thus enabled to publish many details hitherto unknown to the public.

In spite of his general levelheadedness the reader will observe that Young was a man of views and prejudices. A sound system of agriculture in a country counted for much more in his eyes than the development of commerce or the expansion of a colonial Empire. The agricultural State was his ideal and he judged everything from that standpoint. He hated the old wasteful methods of farming, and thoroughly enjoyed the role of an apostle of the new scientific agriculture. He disliked many things from industrial villages to tea drinking, and says what he thinks of these things with emphasis. He was a typical reformer of the late eighteenth century “Why may not the time come,” he asks, “when the whole world shall be in a state of knowledge, elegance and peace?” He had no mercy on the Penal Laws, he would do away with all restrictions on commerce, he would compel the absentees to stay at home, he would abolish all middlemen. With Dr Johnson he

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believed that “a decent provision for the poor is the true test of civilisation,” and he gives a great deal of space to a consideration of the position of the cottier. He was not very much interested in history, antiquities or politics. His historical explanations are often scanty or confused, he frequently passes an old building or place of archaeological interest without due appreciation or without comment, and he tells us little or nothing of the political discussions preceding the establishment of Grattan’s Parliament, which he must have heard something of in Dublin and in the various country houses in which he stayed. He tells us elsewhere that he had a constitutional horror of theorising, which doubtless explains his avoidance of politics, but in any case he belonged to that type of radical reformer who suffers a complete mental reaction in the face of revolution. In later life, it will be remembered that he regretted his championship of liberal tendencies in France, and he afterwards never referred to the Rebellion in Ireland which was so largely the fruit of French influence.

Although of course no single volume could be expected to touch upon every aspect of Irish life at this time, there are certain matters upon which we should have particularly welcomed comment by such an acute observer as Young. To what causes, for instance, would he have attributed the peculiar prosperity of Ulster, remarked upon by Wesley and other English writers of the period? Would he have attributed it to the Ulster Custom of Tenant Right; and how did this interesting Custom work out in practice? What solution would he have suggested for the problem presented by the large body of beggars that were roaming through Ireland at this time, causing considerable anxiety to the Government? What did he think of the immigration of the Irish poor into England? On these and similar matters he is silent.

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The merits of the *Tour* far outweigh its demerits however, for here we have an accurate and fairly complete picture of Ireland as it was during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. All classes are reviewed in turn: the improving landlords, the middlemen, the squires or *buckeens* (familiar to every reader of Irish fiction), the rich graziers, the dairy farmers, the cottiers, and *spalpeens* or casual labourers. Each district is systematically examined: the semi-industrial North, the grazing counties of Tipperary, Limerick, Clare, Meath and Waterford; the sheep ranches of Roscommon; the dairy country of Wexford and Waterford, and the corn counties of Louth, Kildare, Carlow and Kilkenny. Arthur Young seems to have been especially interested in the linen industry and gives us full details of the processes of manufacture. He also describes the Irish fisheries and notes pretty fully the trading activities of the towns. Among other subjects touched upon are the agrarian troubles as evidenced by the Whiteboy movement, emigration from the North, afforestation, and the tithe evil. We get glimpses of the Palatines, the German colonists settled in Ireland at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and of the Quakers who are described as the wealthiest traders in the country. Agriculture however was his passion, and he gives most of his attention to that. "In the management of the arable ground," he declares, "the Irish are five centuries behind the best cultivated of the English counties." He attributes this backward condition to the miserable state of the cottier, as well as to a general lack of skill and to the want of capital. With the English reader in mind he lays a great deal of emphasis on the fact that Irish prosperity was of the greatest importance to England. Capital put into Irish manufactures and tillage farming would he thinks be well invested, for a wealthy Ireland would prove a magnificent market for English manufactures, and the development of the vast natural

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resources of the country by increasing food supplies would be an asset to Great Britain in time of war.

The student of the Irish *Tour* who is familiar with Young's *Travels in France* will miss here the liveliness of style which characterises that classic. The comparative lack of anecdote and humorous incident in the present work is due to an unfortunate accident which befell the author on his return journey to England. On the coaching route between Bath and London, his trunk was stolen by a new servant whom he had taken into his employment, and in that trunk was the private journal kept by him during his Irish tour, together with specimens of soils and minerals that he had collected. The trunk and the precious journal were never recovered, and Young was left with only a dry record, which he designates his *Minutes*, from which to work up his narrative.

Some lively Irish anecdotes are to be found in his *Autobiography*<sup>1</sup> however. From Lord Longford, for instance, he had tales of an Irish gentleman of good estate in his neighbourhood that, as he says, surpass anything to be found in Miss Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*. We record the entry in his own words:

His hospitality was unbounded, and it never for a moment came into his head to make any provision for feeding the people he brought into his house. While credit was to be had, his butler or housekeeper did this for him; his own attention was given solely to the cellar that wine might not be wanted. If claret was secured, with a dead ox or sheep hanging in the slaughter house ready for steaks or cutlets, he thought all was well. He was never easy without company in the house, and with a large party in it would invite another of twice the number. One day the cook came into the breakfast parlour before all the company: "Sir, there's no coals." "Then burn turf." "Sir, there's no turf." "Then, cut down a tree." This was a forlorn hope, for in all probability he must have gone three miles to find one, all

<sup>1</sup> Edited by Miss Betham-Edwards in 1898.

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round the house being long ago safely swept away. They dispatched a number of cars to borrow turf. Candles were equally deficient, for unfortunately he was fond of dogs, all half-starved, so that a gentleman walking to what was called his bedchamber, after making two or three turnings met a hungry greyhound who, jumping up, took the candle out of the candlestick and devoured it in a trice, and left him in the dark. To advance or return was equally a matter of chance; therefore groping his way he soon found himself in the midst of a parcel of giggling maidservants. By what means he at last found his way to his shakedown is unknown.

The *Autobiography* records another anecdote which relates to the Right Hon. Silver Oliver, a gentleman who used to keep a splendid table and with whom Arthur Young had stayed during his tour. After Mr Oliver's death, the latter found himself in the neighbourhood of this gentleman's house where an auction was in progress, and putting his head into the kitchen was horrified to find it a regular "pigstye," very dark with "walls black as the inside of a chimney," no dressers or tables and the hearth heaped with turf. "Etna or Vesuvius might as soon have been found in England," he exclaims, "as such a kitchen." The *Tour* contains no such reminiscences, partly for the reasons given above, and partly perhaps because our author had received so much hospitality in Ireland that he felt that strict politeness was subsequently required. The reader will therefore be glad to have these samples from which he may form a notion as to the nature of other entries in the lost *Journal*. The Irish reader need take no offence from a few stories related at the expense of the Irish gentry, for the whole tone of the *Tour* is friendly to Ireland, and Young was always generously appreciative of the merits of the Irish landlord.

In the *Annals of Agriculture* will be found this passage written by Young in 1791:

My journeys to Ireland, the register of which I published, occupied the years 1776, 1777, 1778 and 1779 including a

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residence in the county of Cork of something more than a year employed in arranging and letting part of the estate of the Lord Viscount Kingsborough<sup>1</sup>. Of that work, I have no apprehension. Though the success in relation to profit was nothing, yet it will stand its ground, and I trust merit in some small degree the most flattering encomiums it has received in many parts of Europe.... I have since learned from the conversation of many most respectable gentlemen of Ireland, as well as from the conversation of others, that the book is now esteemed of some value to Ireland, and that the agriculture of the kingdom has been advanced in consequence of it.

The practical effect of Young's work on Irish economic development is too big a subject to open up here, but it may be mentioned that the valuable surveys of Irish counties issued by the Dublin Society, early in the nineteenth century, were among the first fruits of his influence. The Irish Tour has certainly 'stood its ground' in that it remains our chief authority for Irish economic conditions for the latter part of the eighteenth century.

<sup>1</sup> See note on Mitchelstown, pp. 232–33.

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Arthur Young

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