

Preface

(vii) Donall Mac Amhlaigh was born a short distance outside Galway in 1926. His schooling followed a normal pattern in Ireland in the thirties and forties—elementary school followed by a period of secondary education. At the age of fifteen, he had to leave school and he worked for three years in a woollen mill in Kilkenny where his family had gone to live a year or so beforehand. Galway, however, had cast its spell on him and he found that he could not avoid going back to that lovely city in the west of Ireland that, even in its contemporary development, manages to epitomise so much of what makes up the Irish character and sense of history. There he worked on farms, interspersed with periods as a waiter in various hotels, before he joined the First Battalion of the Irish Army. This is an Irish-speaking unit and in it, he spent what he still regards as the most enjoyable three years of his life. And who, particularly loving Irish as Mr. Mac Amhlaigh does, wouldn't look back nostalgically to three years in Galway where the busy commercial streets and the beautiful surrounding countryside echo to the music of a vigorous and expressive tongue?

When Mr. Mac Amhlaigh left the Army in 1951, Ireland was still in a stage of underdevelopment and there was fairly heavy unemployment. He followed the pattern of the times, emigrated to England and joined those of his countrymen without whose help the British Health Service and the building, light engineering and service industries would have ground to a standstill. This book is an account of his first

(viii) six years in a highly industrialised society for the impact of which he was unprepared but the shock of which, with the resilience of his race, he absorbed. As I write he still works, from choice, on a constructional site near Northampton, where with his wife and two children, he lives contentedly, wielding his pick and shovel by day and his gifted pen by night.

It will be seen that Mr. Mac Amhlaigh, in his first years in exile, speaks with some bitterness of the necessity that made him leave Ireland to earn a living. Understandably enough, he is inclined to blame the authorities but one must look further than that to account for the slowness of development in Ireland during the first thirty years of the State's existence. Leaving aside the chequered history of Ireland up to 1800, I draw a veil over economic affairs in Ireland from the Act of Union with Britain until 1922. Suffice it to note that, after a war of independence from 1916 to 1921 which took its economic toll, a bitter Civil War ensued; the economic effects of both were felt throughout the twenties. In the thirties, the State was in the throes of economic war with Britain which was only resolved in 1938 by which time the guns of the Second World War were being massed and, a year later, used. It was not, therefore, until 1945 that the authorities were able to think in terms of expansion rather than simple survival. From then on, the picture started changing. Slowly and laboriously, the young State built the 'infra-structure' without which economic development cannot take place—housing, hospitals, health services, social welfare services, power, roads, transport, the distributive industry. And then, with the publication of the First Programme for Economic Expansion in 1958, what has come to be called the Irish Economic Miracle was on its way. The Second Programme, which sets desired objectives to be achieved by 1970, has so far maintained the impetus of the years 1958—63 and the outlook for the future is, with hard work by all concerned, bright. Mr. Mac Amhlaigh would, I think, agree that conditions in Ireland have changed enormously since the time he found it necessary to leave his homeland.

The present book, entitled in Irish *Dialann Deorai* (The Diary of an Exile) was one of the most notable and successful books to appear in the Irish language in recent years. It is a remark

(ix) able piece of documentary writing, but it bears all the marks of the creative artist in its attention to detail, its shrewd observation both of person and place and, not least, in its author's ability to tell a story well. In the original, a further characteristic was evident in the author's awareness of, and interest in, the texture and rhythm of the language in which he wrote.

Mr. Mac Amhlaigh was not born with Irish yet he handles the language with all the confidence of one who has profited by many hours spent in the company of those who had it from

the cradle. His understanding of the nature of the language and of its idiom, coupled with a feeling for the individual word and phrase, shows that he has given much thought to the problems confronting him as a writer. If the Irish which he uses is not always that of the native speaker, this is the conscious result of his desire to write the Irish that is widely spoken today in its inevitable development from the older 'pure' language of the Gaeltacht. This alone gives his book a particular importance in the current renaissance that is taking place in Irish literature.

Apart from that, however, his book is an honest account of how the average Irish labourer works, lives in, and makes his contribution to, the development of the country that has given him a good wage for the sweat of his brow.

VALENTIN IREMONGER

Stockholm,
August, 1964.

1 Ward Orderly

(1) The mother saw the ad. in the paper: 'Stokers wanted. Live in. Apply Matron, Harborough Rd. Hospital, Northampton.'

'You could give it a chance,' she said, 'for surely God put it in your way.'

I had been idle the three months since I had left the Army and, as I had to go across anyway, it was as well for me to try this rather than go on spec and wander around looking for lodgings after I had landed. I wrote my letter and off it went and, in God's good time, an answer came in a couple of days. The mother and myself watched every post, our hearts in our mouths all the time hoping for good news. As soon as the answer came, however, both of us got very melancholy, thinking how I'd be leaving home and going foreign. The mother and I had always been very close and, although we both knew that sooner or later I'd have to be off with myself, we were both very much affected at the prospect. My mother called in from the street one of the children playing around there and sent her off to the shop for a sweet cake so that we'd have a celebration in honour of the occasion. As she took up the pot to make the tea, I could see that her eyes were brimming with tears.

I started off on the business straight away. There were enough formalities to be gone through—not like today—and I was afraid that, if I spent too much time getting myself ready, I'd

(2) lose the job. I had to get a passport photo of myself taken and then go and fill up forms at the police station so that I could get an identity card. When that had all been done and when I had written over to the matron, I settled back to wait on the great day. I knew that I'd have to wait about a fortnight.

I felt pretty fed up most of the time then. I had dug the garden but it was a bit too early to sow anything; so that, after signing on at the 'Labour' in the morning, damn the thing I had to do except knock around wherever I pleased. And I can tell you there were plenty of places worth visiting at that time of the year over the rich lands of the County Kilkenny with the spring coming up. For nearly ten years we had been living in Kilkenny after leaving Galway (barring three years I spent in the First Battalion in Renmore just outside Galway City); it was a pity, in a way, that I only got to like the place just as I was about to leave it.

The day after I got news from the hospital, I whistled up the dog and struck out towards Callan with Mick Hogan. It was a fine evening and Mick's little dog and our own Topy were more than happy as they frolicked around in front of us. There wasn't a scree, a hole or a ditch that they didn't examine and they'd let a yelp out of them from time to time as they smelt the trail of a rabbit or a rat. As we left the city behind us, majestic Slievenamon towered regally in front of us while, away to the south, Mount Leinster and the Blackstairs range lay under a beautiful purple haze. All around us, the rough voices of the crows could be heard raucously chattering to each other with, occasionally, the sweet music of the blackbird as it welcomed such a good day.

The mild healthy country air was like a tonic to my friend and the evening passed quickly as he told me about the various dangers he had faced while he had been a soldier in the Connaughts.* Sadly I parted from Old Mick that evening, thinking that maybe I'd never see him again now that I was off to England.

Quickly enough the days went by and, as the time for leaving drew nearer, I could feel the cold talons of despair twining and

* The Connaught Rangers who mutinied in India in 1920 in protest against the Black and Tan atrocities in Ireland.

(3) untwining inside me. I knew that I'd miss the small ordinary things that I had been used to for so long: the company and the kind chat with the lads down at the corner every night; the good-fellowship and the gaiety of the poor people in the 'four-pennies' at the pictures on pay-night; and the excellence of the pints in Larry's pub after closing time. I knew I'd be lonesome too for the sprees and the fun we used to have in our own house from time to time. My sister and two of my

brothers were home at that time; my father and another brother were in the Army—one in Cork, the other in Dublin. A garrulous family we were always—'all wit and no wisdom', as the old lady used to say—and whatever there was to eat on the table, you can be sure that it was flavoured with memorable conversation.

Now above all, I felt like staying at home for ever if I could only have found anything to do: but I hadn't the luck. I was getting twenty-two and six from the Labour Exchange and that wasn't enough to keep anybody. As it was now near enough to my departure time, I said to myself that, before leaving, I'd walk around all those places that were dearest to me. I was very disappointed that I hadn't the money to visit Galway and Renmore and maybe West Connemara too where some of the friends I liked best lived; but I had hardly the price of the odd pint, let alone the bus fare to where my people came from.

Monday, 12.3.1951. This morning I signed on for the last time and then carried a hundredweight of coal home for my mother. I have everything done for her now, the garden planted and cleaned and the old house spruced up a bit on the outside. I'll be able to help her a bit more than that from now on when I'll have the few pence to send to her from England.

I spent the day putting some kind of order into the old box that I keep my papers in and then I went around saying goodbye to the neighbours. Peter's wife was very sorry at my going, the creature. She was kindness itself always and, as for the other people in the district, it would be hard to surpass them. I'd have liked nothing better than to have been able to visit my relatives and old friends back in Galway but, alas! I've only enough to get me across the water with a bit to spare.

The old lady kept her courage up wonderfully until the time

(4) came for me to set off. The tears came then. I didn't delay too long bidding her good-bye. I hugged her once, grabbed my bag and off with me. Indeed, you'd think that even the cat knew I was going for she followed me out mewling piteously.

I stood at the head of the boreen to look back at the house, and there I saw my mother with her left hand up to her mouth as was her habit whenever she was worried about something.

Who did I meet then, as I was crossing the bridge, but Sonny Campbell. Sonny spent a long time in the British Navy and anyone would think that he gets money from the British Government for sending people over from Ireland to join up. He's always running down this country, saying that it's ridiculous for people to stay here seeing the good wages to be had beyond. Some of the lads have a bit of devilment with him, rising him and quizzing him about life over there; but I've noticed that Sonny himself shows no sign of moving across.

He paused when he saw the bag that I was carrying. 'Are you crossing over?' he enquired, with some satisfaction you might think.

'I am, brother,' I said.

'Good man,' he replied rubbing his hands together, 'it won't be long till there's nobody left here at all. They're all going. What is there for them here? You'll never regret it. It won't be long till I'll be crossing myself. Well, good luck to you.'

He shook hands with me and took himself off, as pleased as if I had pressed a half-sovereign into his fist.

Old Johnny Brennan, the Fenian,* was waiting for me outside Smyth's and we went in for a last drink before my departure. The poor man is of a great age—he must be going ninety and, God knows, I mightn't see him again. When the man of the house himself heard where I was off to, nothing would do him but to stand us another drink. It was generous of him, to tell you the truth, for it was seldom enough we went into his pub. The world and its mother knows that I was very upset at having to leave the old Fenian and, indeed, he felt the same about the whole affair.

As I went on to the platform to get on the train, my old dog

* A member of the Fenian Brotherhood who were responsible for the Rising of 1865 against British rule in Ireland.

(5) Topsy was at my heels, however the devil he managed to follow me without my being aware of him. He looked so lonely sitting there on the platform that a lump came into my throat as the train pulled out.

I kept my nose to the window until Three Castles, Dunmore and Ballyfoyle were out of sight. I sat back then and wasn't interested in anything else.

There was a good crowd on the boat with me. The *Princess Maud* we were on and my courage came back to me quickly enough once I found myself amongst them. Before I had been two minutes aboard, who did I meet but the big fellow from Tooreen who had come into Renmore last year to enlist; and a girl from the same place with him. They were off to London and there was another girl from round about Oughterard with them also. We got together straight away and I didn't feel at all lonely while I was with them. The Irish of the girl from Oughterard wasn't as good as the Irish the other two spoke but there was nothing wrong with her apart from that. I met many people from those parts that hadn't any Irish at all.

We had only time to have a drop of tea when the boat started moving and before we knew where we were, we were edging away from the quay. I got well to the back of the boat to have a good gander at Ireland and the bright lights north there of Dun Laoire; and, suddenly, I felt lonely all over again. I started thinking about the old house with the pots of tea that we'd drink before going to bed and my heart felt like a solid black mass inside my breast.

I didn't leave the place until the last light had sunk out of sight. Only then did I go looking for the other three.

I stood on John Bull's territory for the first time in my life on Tuesday morning when I got off the Irish Mail at Rugby. I don't count Holyhead for that's really Welsh and there was as much Welsh spoken there as there was Irish on a fair day in Derrynea. I lost my friends in the customs hail and I never saw them again. And what a to-do there was about our bags! You'd think that we were carrying priceless jewels instead of the few old rags we had. There was one man who shoved on to the counter an old battered case that was tied with a bit of rope to keep it shut.

(6) 'What have you got here?' said the customs officer.

'Yerra, nothing at all,' said my lad with a grin.

'Open it up, all the same,' said your man.

'Sure, it's hardly worth my while,' said the lad.

'Look here, you're only wasting both our time. I can't let you through until you open up that bag.'

'Fair enough,' said my lad and drew out of his pocket a bloody big knife with which he cut the rope around the case. The lid jumped up just like a Jack-in-the-Box and out leapt an old pair of Wellington boots that had been twisted up inside it. Devil the thing else was in the case—not even a change of socks. A melancholy wintry little smile crossed the face of the customs officer as he motioned to your man to get along with himself.

I slept most of the way from there to Rugby and, when I left the train, I had a two-hour delay before I caught the train to Northampton. My heart sank altogether then as I stood and looked around at the dirty ugly station. Everything looked so foreign to me there. Round about six o'clock hundreds started pouring into the station, pallid pasty faces with identical lunch boxes slung from their shoulders. They were all getting the train to work and their likes were getting off the train at the same time coming to work in Rugby, I suppose. God save us, I murmured to myself as I thought that nobody in Ireland would be even thinking of getting out of their beds for another couple of hours yet!

I reached Northampton by eight o'clock on a slow train that took three-quarters of an hour to do that short journey. On all sides, there was nothing to be seen but farming land and cattle; and I felt my isolation more and more as I saw that I was right in the heart of England where I was unlikely to meet a single Irishman. The black chimney stacks of London would have been preferable just then as I knew that I'd have met some of my own people there whatever else.

As I got off the train at Northampton, I enquired about the hospital and a man said that he was going in that direction on the bus and that I might as well go with him. I didn't know from God what he was saying most of the time but I gathered that he was a Catholic married to a Roscommon woman and

(7) that she had converted him. When I got off the bus, I had only another quarter-mile to go. I slung my bag up on my shoulder and started off without any more delay.

Some oul' wan took me in hand when I got to the hospital door and got me a bit of breakfast. There was a foreign crowd in the canteen when I got there and I was told that they were D.P.'s—Ukrainians and Poles and suchlike—that had been driven from their homes during the war. When I had eaten my meal—and, God knows, it wasn't hard to dispose of a drop of tea and a bit of bread and jam—I was brought in to the matron so that she could tell me the conditions under which I would work and all that sort of thing. I was supposed to be taking up a job as a boilerman; but after a few minutes' conversation, she asked me would I not prefer to be an orderly instead. I said that I didn't mind one way or the other but that I thought I'd be a better hand with the old shovel; but she wheedled me so much into taking the other job that in the end I agreed.

Then I went to bed to rid myself of the weariness of the journey. Soundly indeed I slept and didn't waken until five o'clock. After shaving and washing, I made my way down to supper and, God knows, I felt shy enough going down among all the nurses in the canteen. It wasn't the same room that I had been in during the morning for it seems that the nurses and the orderlies have a canteen to themselves apart from the ward-maids and the boilermen. Some devilish stuff called spam was for supper accompanied by roast potatoes; but I was so hungry at this stage that I left not a single thing on my plate.

I mosied off down town then to see what kind of a place it was and I had a couple of pints of ale in some pub. I didn't care very much for this drink: it didn't stand up very well in comparison with a pint of porter. The pubs were nice and clean and the people pleasant enough but somehow or other I didn't take to them. There were games going on all the time in the pub—darts, skittles and suchlike with a jukebox screeching away all the time. I couldn't help comparing it with Larry's pub back home—the good wise chat and the manliness that I shared with those drinking there. The women are as plentiful in the pubs here as there are fleas on a goat and no man can be at ease wherever they are.

(8) I spent some time talking to the man that was in the room with me. Bert was his name. He was a nice decent man, it seemed, and I got on quite well with him. He was from Cambridge and maybe that's why I understood him so well.

I started the next morning in Ward I. I had to wear a white coat over my own clothes and I felt a bit of a fool in that rig-out. This was a children's ward and I found them all mannerly enough, the poor things. There was a nice nurse with me there—a Lithuanian—but her English was good. I don't know that I'll like this place at all but I doubt it. It's the devil and all to have to be working with women.

I was given the lead polisher (as Paddy Ryan used to call it back in Renmore) to work and, in no time at all, I had a fine sheen on the floor. The women showed some surprise at my being so good. Little they thought that I spent many a day with the same yoke when I was C.B. in the Army. It's mostly Irish girls that are here between nurses and others but they weren't very Gaelic—the bunch I saw anyhow. God be with the wonderful girls back there in Connemara! It didn't take very long to get to know them at a dance or a booley; but so far as this gang of Irish is concerned, I feel more of a foreigner with them than I do with the foreigners themselves.

I wrote a short letter home to the old lady and then I went out with Tommy Power from County Waterford, a young lad that's working here. We went down to the Royal Oak (every pub here had its own special name) and had a couple of pints. A bottle of Guinness costs one and twopence here (compared with sevenpence at home) and it has a bitter enough flavour. You never

hear tell of a pint of porter here but the Irish drink pints of stout and mild—a sweetish mixture that they think is something like the pint of porter.

The air is very healthy in these parts.

There's no doubt about it but the nurse that works with me is a lovely woman. I passed a good part of the day talking to her, discoursing about this language and that and I thought that a lot of the words in her own tongue were similar enough to words that we have in Irish.

I'm afraid, from what I have seen so far, in this place, that

(9) the Irish girls don't come within an ass's roar of the 'foreigners' so far as deportment, manners and that sort of thing is concerned. They have an ugly fashion of screeching with laughter in the canteen and they have the most revolting English idioms at the tips of their tongues—such as 'you've had it, mate', and 'crikey'. There's something demeaning about the Irish person that imitates the English or other people. I don't think that, even if I was here until Doomsday, I'd ever acquire any of the unpleasant idioms that they use around the place.

I went down for the Rosary and then walked slowly home afterwards. Damn this place, there's nothing in it. Bad and all as it might be, there's more in Kilkenny!

I was really fed up with myself today for a while as I thought about the times we had in the Army back in Renmore. All right—you might have good enough pay over here but by the time my keep was deducted there was only about four quid left for myself. And a wise little head from Waterford was telling me that I'd only get two days pay this week because they usually keep you a week in arrears until you're leaving.

I went down to the National Insurance Office this afternoon to get a ration book, an identity card and an insurance card. In this country everybody has to have these papers and I'd say it would go hard with you to put a foot in front of you without notifying the authorities. They were wonderfully pleasant in the office, unlike their kind back home in Ireland and I was finished with the business without too much delay. I then walked around the town for a while and I was surprised at the size of the people there. I had always thought that the English were small people but it seems that in these parts they are very tall and you'd never think from them that they hadn't had enough to eat for years.

Another thing that you couldn't help noticing was how well-dressed they were compared with the people back home. I didn't see a single person with threadbare clothes or worn-out footwear. Clothes and much else are dearer here than in Ireland and I'm thinking that I'd be well advised to go home to Ireland once a year and fit myself out.

I got a great wish for a handful of sweets but I couldn't buy them as I hadn't any coupons. I went into one of the big stores

(10) and had a drop of tea. I thought for a long time about my old comrades in the Army—Ward, Colum the Champion and Michael Saile's son—the lot of them. They're all over here now if one only knew where to look for them.

Tomorrow is St. Patrick's Day and there's great talk among the Irish about the Feast.

Feast of St. Patrick of the Gael. A box of shamrock arrived from home this morning. I was free for the first part of the day and I went out to Mass. I couldn't believe that there were so many people from Ireland in the city. Every fourth person that I met had the shamrock up and the church was full to overflowing. After Mass, they hung around outside the church just as they do at home and I have to say that I never saw such fine strong men and such lovely girls for a long time. I was pleased and proud to see them like that for those up where I work are pretty poor types.

I wandered off down the city by myself and dropped into a pub where the Irish gathered. To tell you the truth I wouldn't have been able to go in for a drink but for the fact that Bert, my room-mate, gave me a pound that morning. He asked me if I was going out for a few drinks in honour of the Saint. I said I wasn't. He then tried to find out the reason for this as he found it incredible that an Irishman wouldn't have a drink on St. Patrick's Day. He sensed soon enough

what the trouble was and he said nothing more but pressed a paper pound into my hand. There was one generous Englishman for you although as a race they're not noted for liberality.

The *Admiral Rodney* was the name of the pub I dropped into and it was full to the doorways with fine Irish boys, all of them knocking back their pints. I made my way in and got a drink for myself, keeping an eye out the whole time in case I'd see a man from Connemara. There weren't any there, however; it seemed that most of the men were from the County Mayo. These lads had none of the foreign airs that the women up at the hospital had and, but for their being dressed so well, you'd have thought that you were back in a pub in the West of Ireland on a fair-day.

They have the habit here—the Irish as well as everybody

(11) else—of moving from pub to pub instead of staying in the one place as we do at home. When the fun was at its highest in the Rodney, the boys started moving off. At first, I thought they were going off home for their dinner but when I asked one of the men he said no, they were going down to the Bull. The crowd down there would come up to the Rodney and so on. I thought to myself that I had better get down to the Bull to see what was going on there that was different from here so I followed the crowd out.

The lads here are very friendly and, unless you were careful, you'd be in the company in no time and they'd be buying drinks for you. I wasn't in any position to be joining company like that for I had only the pound Bert had given me and I wanted to keep something out of it for later in the evening.

One of the men down at the Bull had an accordion and was knocking great music out of it. There was hardly a jig or a horn-pipe that he didn't play and I could feel the heart rising inside me. I'd have given anything to have been able to stay until closing time but I had to go on duty at one o'clock and I was late for the dinner already.

It's a long spell from one until eight but, somehow, I didn't notice it passing. Devil the much I had to do there in the children's section bar keeping the place clean and going round with the meals. But they tell me that I'll be changing over on Monday to a section where I'll have more to do.

I moved off down town after supper and I found it hard enough to get away without that young devil Nicholas knowing about it. I had a drink or two (I couldn't buy more) and I saw a lot of the boys blind drunk by this time. I went to the dance then and, although I had never been there before, I had no difficulty in finding the place, there were so many making their way there. The band wasn't all that good and there were only one or two Irish dances the whole night.

A couple of fights started but those taking part were thrown out as soon as they got rough. There's a big strong priest from County Cork there, Father James Galvin, and he's six and a half feet tall if he's an inch. He's in charge of the Irish Club and, as the dance was being run by the club, he was responsible for keeping the peace at it. He and another sturdy man went in

(12) amongst those who were fighting and threw them out of the door just as you'd throw out rubbish that you had no use for. That was the end of the ructions.

There was a small group of women inside also and most of them came from the place where I was working. I can't say that I enjoyed that night all that much. God be with this night last year and the great Irish spree we had in Curran's in Galway—Ward, Kerry, Michael Jim and myself. They were men whose company was worth while.

Sunday morning I had to get up very early as I had to get first Mass since I had to be on duty until one o'clock. That's the worst of this place—that you have to work different shifts all the time. I was free from one until five and I spent the afternoon writing a few letters home.

There are so many languages being spoken here that it's worse than the Tower of Babel. You can hear Italian, Ukrainian, German and Lithuanian on all sides but, alas! not a word of Irish. I must teach a few words to that wild devil, Nicholas; it's not so long since he left school so it shouldn't be too hard to get him speaking it again. He wouldn't be here at all but for the fact that

his sister is a nurse in the hospital and she brought him over from Ireland so that he wouldn't break his mother's heart altogether. They have a farm at home but since the father died, there was no controlling Nicholas. He is to be sent out to New York as soon as possible; and it's a damn pity he's not going tomorrow.

He's a sturdy boy and, although he's not yet eighteen years old, he's as strong as a bull. He has me pestered because all the men working here are either D.P.'s or Englishmen and Nick dislikes the whole lot of them. He regards himself as a first-rate loyal Irishman and he thinks that the best way he can show his loyalty is by perpetually fighting with the English and the foreigners. His sister came over this morning to ask me to look after him as she thought I might help to improve him. It's more likely that he'll find himself on his backside on the floor if he doesn't leave me a bit of peace!

But to go back to the question of languages, the foreign people here have an amazing grasp of them. Apart from the

(13) Italians, there isn't a national group that isn't able to speak about four languages. For instance, the Ukrainians are able to speak German, Polish and a little Lithuanian; the Germans and the Poles are the same. There are about ten Italians here and they only speak their own tongue but probably because they never had to leave their own country like the others. Except for one woman, they're all from Naples and they're marvellous musicians. They live for singing and they have a life and vigour in them that nobody else has.

The woman here from the north of Italy has no regard at all for the other Italians that are here and she says that they are dirty and lazy at home. That can't be said about them here, however, and they are a gay and lively crowd. It is as maids they work here since they have so little English. Some of the other foreigners work as hospital orderlies, or as assistant nurses; the English and the Irish have the best jobs. For example, the matron is English of Irish extraction; the deputy matron and half the sisters are Irish.

I still had the price of the dance in the Irish Club (eighteen-pence) left over from yesterday so I went down about an hour before the end. There was a fine gathering of girls there; and who, should I meet but my old friend, Stephen O'Toole, (Steve Darby) from Spiddal. We spent at least a half an hour talking about Spiddal and the great *ceilis* that went on there in our day. Two lads were needling one another in the hail all the night and, when the dance was over, they asked the priest to give them the boxing gloves and to act as referee for them. When all the women were gone, the doors were locked and we gathered around to see the fight. They spent half an hour skipping around one another and falling and holding without either of them damaging the other until the priest had to send them packing off home in the end.

'Fighters,' he said in disgust, 'sure you'd beat them with your cap'

But they tell me that there's many a good hard fight takes place there under the priest's auspices. Father Galvin believes that whatever enmity may arise between a couple of men, it's better settled there in the Club rather than have them fighting it out in the street and giving bad example to the pagans.

(14) Stephen walked home a bit of the way with me and we talked for a good while before we finally parted. He was amazed to find me working in the hospital and he advised me to get out of it as I'd get twice as much pay working with him on the navvying. Maybe I'll do it, too!

I started to try to teach Nick some Irish. Though he'd like to know it, however, the devil hasn't enough patience to learn anything. We made up a plan to pull the wool over the eyes of the foreigners so as to pretend that we always spoke Irish among ourselves. Nick knew a good deal of songs from school and what we arranged to do whenever anybody would be listening to us, was that I would say conversationally a line of poetry: 'What will we do without timber?' Nick would then answer with the next line: 'The last of the forest is down'; I would follow with the next line and so on. We planned to laugh now and again and to appear to be angry from time to time. We got a chance to do it this afternoon when there were some Poles and Ukrainians standing

around the back door enjoying the first bit of sun I've seen since I came here. Nick and I came to the door pretending that we were delighted to see the sun shining at last. I looked up at the sun and then as if I was commenting on the weather, I remarked: 'What will we do without timber?'

'Oh! be gor, the last of the forest is down,' said the lad.

I stretched myself lazily and said:

'Kilcash and its house are forgotten.'

'And its bell will be heard no more,' said Nick. I let on that I was feeling a bit down and I made a face.

'And what the devil about that place where the oul' wan lived?' I said.

Nick gave me a kick on the ankle.

'Stick to your lines,' he said venomously. I had put him off his stroke with my improvisation and he couldn't think of what came after the idea in that line. I rescued him then, however, with:

'The duck or the goose won't be heard there.'

'Or the eagle above the bay,' he replied.

The foreigners were all ears by now and I could see that they were amazed at all this Irish. They started looking at us with a

(15) new respect, even that Ukrainian Pizzarenko whom Nick was always annoying and challenging. We were well away, I'm telling you, but for Nick's sister arriving at that very moment and hearing what we were at.

'Well, there's a good man,' she said to me, 'teaching Nicky Irish and when he was at home he'd learn nothing.'

All the foreigners burst out laughing and Nick almost jumped up a mile in the air in a fit of rage. He threw a malevolent glance at Pizzarenko and started leaping around with his two fists up and shouting: 'All right, Pizzy, put them up. Come on and fight like a man. I'll teach you to laugh at the Irish.'

But your man Pizzy sloped off to his own room breaking his heart laughing.

Nick is in a blinding rage ever since and it's not safe to talk to him, never mind anything else.

On Tuesday morning I started work in Ward 4 and there's a great difference between it and the first place. They are all adults in this ward—man with skin diseases (dermatitis and such like). I was anything but idle between sweeping out the floors, going around with meals and drinks and learning to put ointment on the limbs and bodies of the patients. There's a very nice girl working on the same shift as myself and I'm amazed that I didn't see her until today for the hospital isn't all that big. She's from Sligo and she's engaged to a Lithuanian from that camp up at Boughton. Pretty is hardly the word for her with her curly black hair, her lovely freckled brow and her two black eyes dancing with gaiety in her head. She talked about everything to me and, any time she could, she asked me into the kitchen for a drop of tea.

The doctor goes his round once a day and he's a real gentle-man. They say that he's the best man on these illnesses in the whole country. Dr. Coles is his name. I can't get over how nice the doctors and others like them are in this country—quite different from home. Of all that are here, there's only one that's anyway arrogant and she's an Irishwoman.

This afternoon I had to go off and strip two of the patients and put this stuff they call Ingram's Ointment on them. I thoroughly disliked the whole business at first but then I began

(16) to pity the poor creatures and, after that, it didn't cost me a thought. They're all very kind and gentle and always very grateful for anything you do for them. I was finished at three o'clock.

A letter and a paper came from home. My mother is pleased that I'm working here as she thinks that I'd be far worse off out in lodgings. Maybe she's right, indeed, but the big money is tempting me away all the time.

On Wednesday, I finished at nine o'clock and I had to be back again at one. A strange thing happened to me then as I was going down Harborough Road to pay a visit to the church. I

was passing a certain house when I noticed the name that was over the door—Earlsmere. Suddenly, I felt, that I had been here some other time in my life standing outside the self-same house. It was as if I was waiting for someone and for a moment I expected to meet that person. It's not the first time that this has happened to me.

I didn't feel the evening passing as I was interested in the work. Some of the old men in the ward are from the small towns in these parts and their dialects are interesting enough. There's one Scotsman here, Mr. Gardiner, and he's in a terrible state—his whole skin peeling away in large dry flakes. He has a huge appetite and you have to keep watching him the whole time as he is not supposed to eat too much. I went to put a new bandage and some ointment on him and it was clear to me that the poor man didn't care what you did to him. He was perpetually shaking with the cold, and they tell me that it's the loss of the skin that's the cause of this. He was a train driver before he was laid low and isn't it sad to think that he's lying there now without understanding or perception or any of the things that he had to have to hold down such a job?

Visiting hours were from two until four o'clock and I was surprised to see how many people came to see their relatives. Mr. Gardiner's wife was the first in and she stayed until the very last minute. Twelve miles she has to travel to get here but they say that she never allows a day go by without coming in. Visitors are allowed three times a week, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday, and on other days they are allowed to come to see the patients from a quarter to seven until a quarter to eight in the evenings.

(17) I went down to the Rosary in the evening and met Steve Darby. He told me that Ward had got two months for assaulting a soldier down in Kidderminster.

Two pounds fourteen I drew on Thursday—three days' pay, God save the mark! I sent a pound of that home to the old lady. I went across to Kingsthorpe and bought myself a tin whistle and then spent the afternoon trying to get some semblance of music out of it. I managed 'Wrap the Green Flag Round Me, Boys' well enough but if I blew the thing for ever I couldn't get anything more complex out of it. Festie Conlon from Ballintaggart was a great man at it but I'm afraid that I mustn't have any talent despite my love of music.

A new man came to work with us on a part-time basis. His name is Ray and he is studying at the university at Oxford. He's working here during the Easter vacation because although he's at Oxford his people aren't all that well off, and if he wants a bit of spare cash, he has to earn it himself. I had a very interesting conversation with him and he told me that I spoke 'remarkably good English'. He thought the Irish had betrayed themselves unconscionably when they forsook their own language. When I said that we got a good deal of help from his own people in forsaking the Irish language, he laughed at me.

'Oh, come, . come,' he said, 'you're not .going to tell me that we coerced you into dropping the Gaelic. We discouraged it, perhaps, but coercion—no!'

He got a good one over on Anita, the Italian maid working in our ward. We were both talking about languages and various other things as we were having a cup of coffee and Anita wanted to get us out of the kitchen so that she could clean it. She warned us a couple of times and when we paid no attention to her, she started cleaning all around us: and she was pretty annoyed, I can tell you. She let flow a stream of Italian at us to begin with and then she roared in English. 'All Irish dirty; all English lazy.'

'All Italians dirty and lazy,' Ray spat.

She grabbed her bucket of water and the floorcloth and I wouldn't think that it was a blessing she left with us as she swept out of the kitchen.

(18) Worked until half past five on Good Friday. This is the shift we like best here; you're ready nice and early and there's plenty of time to go wherever you please. The girls who work here as wardmaids or assistant nurses only get between two pounds ten and three pounds depending on their age. The domestics, however, get about a pound more for some reason that I can't fathom since the assistant nurses' work is much worse and dirtier.

There was a good crowd in the church tonight. I kept Lent badly this year, God forgive me. The English don't believe in anything and for them today is nothing more than the beginning of the Easter holiday—the day for eating hot-cross buns. Some of the Irish are as bad as them and, as I passed the pubs, I noticed that there were a lot of Irishmen in them. Today above any day of the year, I wouldn't like to touch a pint no matter how deep my longing for one.

Bert and I spent a long time talking when we went to bed. He's a decent, understanding poor devil and he went through a lot between the war and everything else. He tells me that there's nothing as good as the fine farming land down around his own place in Cambridgeshire and he has no regard at all for the farmers in these parts. He himself is the son of a small farmer but his father had to give up his place during the war and Bert has been working here in the hospital as a laundry-hand since he left the Army. Old soldiers understand one another anyway and I get more from Bert than from that rogue Nick up above.

An old man from Ballinrobe came into the ward on Saturday with a skin disease on both his arms from the elbows down. He is a Burke and after talking to him for a while I discovered that he had plenty of information about Captain Boycott* who lived in his part of the country long ago. Burke has been here since he was twenty but, to listen to him talking, you never think that he had left home at all. He spent his whole life navvying and that is still what he's doing though he's getting a bit long in the tooth for that work now. He has been in every part of this

* The actions of his oppressed tenants towards him gave the word 'boycott' to the English language.

(19) country and I could listen to him for ever talking about the 'pinchers'* with whom he spent some time working.

When the doctor came in the afternoon, I was sent round the patients with him as there was no trained nurse available. We went round the lot of them and when we came to the man from the County Mayo, the doctor had a bit of a chat with him. As we left him, the doctor said to me:

'Notice how tense he is? We must see if we can find out what's worrying the poor fellow.'

It seems that worry or some form of mental anguish produces this disease in people and, if they can succeed in ridding themselves of the psychological disturbance, the illness clears itself up quickly enough. I surmised, however, that there was nothing of that nature wrong with Burke and that it was only the lack of ease that poor people back in Ireland have when talking to doctors and suchlike, particularly when they're not used to them. I had noticed the same thing earlier in the day when the sister in charge of the ward came along and spoke to Burke. I was going to mention this to the doctor but I thought it would be out of place for the likes of me to be teaching the man his business and I let the opportunity pass. All the same, the servant often sees a lot that the master doesn't notice.

There's a very nice young boy in this ward also. His name is Nicholas Dimidvik and he comes from the Ukraine. You'd think he was from Connemara to listen to him talking. He left home when he was eleven and he has never been back there since. He spent some time in the concentration camps at Buchenwald and Dachau. Like most of the other D.P.'s that I met since I came here, he's not too keen at all on this country and, like the rest of them also, he's always complaining. The Italians aren't like that at all—those that are here in the hospital at all events. The Italians exult because, they have left hardship and poverty behind them at home. Wouldn't you think now that the Poles and the Ukrainians had as much trouble? But the Italians are always lively and gay while the others are dour and gloomy.

I went to Confession tonight and I walked for a while around town afterwards. There's always a lot of people knocking

* Pincher: a labourer.

(20) around here on Saturday night—going from pub to pub. They don't drink as much as the Irish do, but they make so much noise and talk that you'd think they were doing the devil and all. That's their way, I suppose, and it's not for me to find fault with it.

You couldn't help noticing the fine women here, their numbers and their beauty. There are more blondes here than you'd ever see in Ireland but redheads are very few and far between. A lot of them have black hair but it hasn't got the blue-black quality that you get in Ireland. One thing I noticed since coming here—that you'd know an Irish person easier than anyone else. They usually have curly black hair and high reddish cheek-bones but even without these traits you can pick them out easily—except for the odd person.

To bed early.

Easter Sunday. I borrowed a bike this morning and went to first Mass so that I was able to be back on duty at half past seven. The man from Ballinrobe is getting worse and he told me that he didn't sleep well last night. He can't stop scratching his hands and that's not good for him. He had never spent a night in hospital before this and I think that it worries him to be here at all. I took away his clothes today to store them until he'd be leaving. The poor devil, he had nothing but a pair of corduroy breeches, hobnailed boots, a jacket and a cap. Isn't it little good all the big money he got since the war did him when he hadn't a penny to face the bad times with?

Mr. Gardiner was very elevated today, whatever the cause, and he started singing a bit at dinner. It was great of him to do it, I think. He stayed in good form through the afternoon while his wife was visiting him. She said: 'That's my own puir Jock back to his old self again, singin' and laughin' like he used to do before he got bad. Och, we'll no feel till you're back home again now, my puir wee lamb.'

But she's mistaken, I'm thinking. She was no sooner gone than he got gloomy again and he didn't speak for the rest of the day. The nice little nurse from Sligo tells me that he's the patient the doctor has the least hope for, whatever the reason is.

(21) I thought to get away tonight without Nick knowing but he was watching me too closely and I had only got to the gate when he came up to me. I hadn't much money left and, however little it was, I wanted to spend it in my own way without anyone urging me from this pub to that pub unless I wanted to move myself.

That's the way Nick is—he's no sooner settled down in one pub than he wants to move on somewhere else. He's quarrelsome, too, and he thinks that because he's Irish he has to be challenging people. I was always easy-going enough but I'm afraid that if this young buck is hanging around me too often I'll have to take steps to defend myself. He nearly started a real fight tonight in the *Criterion*. The way it was, we were going down to the Gents—in this pub you have to go downstairs to the lavatory—when Nick got sick and started vomiting when we were only about half-way down. A young English chap, a fine cut of a man, was coming up past us and he said civilly enough:

'Had too much, then? Silly boy.'

Nick turned on him straight away and spat:

'Who are you calling—eejit.'

The boy got annoyed at this and not without reason though he probably didn't understand a word of what Nick had said even though the words had been addressed to him. There would have been a right row between them but for my intervention, though when that happened Nick was more inclined to attack me than the other fellow. I was pretty well fed up with the whole affair by this, however, and if he had really started on me, there's nothing more certain but that he'd have got a right belting.

I'll stay far away from him for the future, for he's a complete bowsey.

I was off on Monday but, if so, it was little good to me for I had no money; and I still owed Bert that quid. All the same, the day was a good one and I had great gas with the Italians after

lunch. Seven or eight of them were gathered together down in the club-room singing their native songs and I'm telling you none of them were in the slightest bit shy. I'm picking up an odd

(22) word of Italian here and there such as *Che ora e? Quando lufini lavore?* and other phrases like those. I think that anybody that knew a bit of Latin would find it easy enough to learn Italian and, like German, it's not all that foreign to anyone that speaks English. The other languages that are spoken here, Ukrainian and Polish, are not in any way related to western European languages, so far as I know, although an odd word here and there bears a resemblance to certain words in Irish.

Bert invited me out to the New Theatre tonight and I hadn't the heart to refuse. So out I went with him. I didn't care for the show all that much—dry old chestnuts and stupid little sketches. But bad and all as it was, there was worse to come. The curtain came down for a short interval and the violinists started off with a loud screechy kind of music that would have been enough to set the dogs themselves off. Suddenly, then, up went went the curtain and what faced us there on the stage but five or six naked women—oh! I tell you that they hadn't as much as a bit of thread on them, the rips—and each of them looked as if they hadn't had a bit of food for about six months. They stood there for a short while without as much as a sound from them, and all the time, the bandit of a manager was holding forth in a meek respectful voice about the beauty of womankind since the beginning of time—about Helen of Troy and all that—pretending that he was engaged in something noble and artistic when all it was, in fact, was a despicable method of enticing people in to spend their money.

Bert was thoroughly satisfied with the night and I didn't like to say that I by no means felt the same since he was such a decent fellow. But it will be a long time before I'm inveigled into that damned theatre again.

Doesn't a body become very used to a place quickly enough?

A fortnight ago today I arrived in this place for the first time but, short and all as the period has been, I've got so used to the work and the people that I imagine that I've been here for years. I had a fine long letter from my mother giving me all the news and that's what set me thinking about how quickly I've got used to this kind of life.

Burke was a bit improved when I went into him this morning

(23) and the doctor is talking about letting him home soon. 'Well, I think we could nearly let you go home, Mr. Burke,' Dr. Coles remarked to him on his round this morning. 'You seem to have cured yourself.'

As we moved a bit away from him, the doctor said to me. 'I wish I could get at the reason for his tenseness. I had a little chat with him yesterday but couldn't seem to find out anything much.'

Well, I said to myself; I might as well give him my own opinion whatever he says about it.

'Well, I think I may be able to throw some light on it, Doctor,' I said. 'You see, at home in Ireland a great many of our people were brought up somewhat in awe of professional people like yourself and they never feel quite at ease in the presence of doctors, lawyers and other like people. I've noticed it often and in my opinion that's what is wrong now. Mr. Burke is only tense when yourself or the sister is around.'

At first, I thought he was going to tell me that he knew about these things better than I did but, on my soul, he didn't. He was indeed very interested in what I said.

'H'm, how interesting,' he replied. 'Well, it seems as though we go to the other extreme in this country, because there's rarely any great respect shown to a doctor here and half of my patients try to tell me what to do.'

Poor Burke was as excited as a child when he was told that he could go off home. He didn't like the hospital and hadn't been at ease at all since he was admitted. Maybe the cement or the

diesel oil from the mixer was the cause of his skin trouble for they say that building workers often come in with the same ailment. That other poor man, Mr. Gardiner, was in a bad way today and he didn't want anyone to come next or near him, even to make his bed or do anything like that.

Nelly, the girl from Sligo, was telling me this afternoon that it won't be long now till she marries and goes off to Canada where a lot of her in-laws are already. Wouldn't you think, now, that it was a poor thing for a nice little girl like that to be married out in that place to a foreigner, and not one of her own people anywhere near her? They say that the Lithuanians and the Poles stay closely together when they emigrate to Canada,

(24) for there's not all that much welcome for them out there. Anyway, I sincerely hope that Nelly will be lucky wherever she goes for she's a really decent girl. She has been very good to me ever since I came here and there are times when I think that it wouldn't be all that much trouble to entice her from her man, if I went about it properly. But, alas! it will be a long time yet before I can begin to think of anything like that; and, even then, maybe I won't come across the likes of Nelly.

I was finished at five and I wrote letters after tea. I sent off a good long one to my mother, telling her about life here and the price of clothes and all that kind of thing—stuff that she would be interested in; and I wrote off to the old Fenian also. I won't send off that letter until Thursday when I'll be able to send him the price of a drink with it.

Whit Sunday. This is my last day working in the hospital and sorry enough I feel about it. But, even so, I wouldn't stay on working for four pounds five shillings a week when help was needed so much back home. I was sorry to have to say good-bye to the patients and they felt somewhat the same as we all got on together very well. I learned that much about patients who suffered from skin diseases—that it does them more good that people should be gay and encouraging with them than that they should have all the ointments and tonics in the world. That is, of course, if the cause of their illness is psychological. If the disease was contracted from someone else or was contracted from contact with something infected, it is another story.

Indeed, any young lad without dependents could do worse than go and learn the business from start to finish and he'd always be sure of a good job as long as he'd live.

9. An Exile's Homesickness

(175) *Good Friday*. I always feel very guilty on this day and I'm always glad when it's over. There's a great difference between Good Friday at home and Good Friday here.

To the English, it's only the beginning of the holiday, a day on which you eat hot-cross buns; and they work on that day so that they can have Easter Tuesday off. Some of the Irish are just as bad and they think nothing of going out drinking and celebrating that night. Well, it wasn't like that for the old people who would have nothing to eat but a bit of dry bread or to drink but a drop of black tea throughout the whole day and who would spend most of the time saying the Rosary.

First thing in the morning, I felt I wanted to get home. Some of the lads were talking of going to Dublin for Easter and I began to think of doing the same. Like Raftery* long ago, I had no peace until I gave in to my urge.

When I got home from work, I gave myself a good scrubbing, put on my Sunday suit, took three spare collars and a tooth-brush, stuck a razor in my pocket and made my way to the station. I was as excited as a child as I thought of the trip particularly as I had started out quite spontaneously. I was amazed at how many were making their way home.

* An eighteenth century wandering Irish poet who wrote a well-known poem about his longing to be back in his own county.

(176) As usual, I slept most of the way from Rugby onwards. I never can stay awake with the noise of the wheels and the swaying of the train on the rails. As we crossed Conway Bridge, the noise woke me up but I fell asleep again; and when I woke up again, I saw the sea stretched out like a mirror under the moonlight.

I got a great kick out of going through the Customs shed at Dun Laoire in the morning with nothing whatsoever to declare. I had a good breakfast in that café that is directly opposite Westland Row Station. You have to be impressed with the waitresses in the restaurants in Dublin—they're so chatty and contented in themselves unlike their counterparts in England.

When I finished, I moved off down town to have a look at the place. Isn't it maddening that I know more about London than I know about Ireland's first city?

For instance, I wouldn't know where in Dublin to look for the kind of company I frequent over there—that is, if there is any equivalent. Here in Dublin, there are Irish of all kinds—rich, poor, intelligent and ignorant—but in England, for the most part, there is only one kind of Irishman and that is the worker. If you live long enough over there, you begin to think that all the Irish are working-class—which, of course, is not true.

I bought an Easter Lily* on the Bridge and walked slowly up O'Connell Street. I bought a copy of *Inniu* and of *Aiseiri* in Eason's and took them in with me to the Tower Bar. I knocked back two pints very pleasantly while I listened to the chat all around me. The atmosphere in the pubs here is marvellous compared with those over the way. There's a depth and a vigour in the talk you hear; and the odd time you get women present, they're not screaming and roaring like the English women. In Dublin pubs, you'd know that the drink and the conversation were the most important things; but in England, the drink is only an excuse for playing cribbage and darts. May our lovely Irish pubs last forever!

The two things I noticed most here in Dublin were the prettiness of the women and the poverty of many of the people. If you had nothing else to remind you that you were in Ireland,

* Sold at Easter to commemorate the 1916 rising.

(177) the women's faces would confirm the fact for you. Irish women facially, don't resemble the women of any other country, I think. High cheek-bones, freckles, grey-blue eyes and black curly hair are what you notice most about the women in this city. And it's amazing how many girls have those characteristics when you recall how much Danish and English blood has been here for so many centuries.

Alas, the other matter, the poverty is as noticeable here. You'd be hard put to count how many people passed you by in old, worn clothes. Most of them are in threadbare overcoats and their shoes are badly worn down. You don't see people like that in England at all nowadays; and, in themselves, they epitomise the bad way in which Ireland finds herself.

Two hours it took on the diesel to Kilkenny. On my way home from the station, I dropped into Stephen Brennan's for a drink. Stephen nearly had a fit when he saw me coming in.

'Oh, by God,' he cried, 'I thought you were gone!'

'Gone where?' I asked him.

'Over the way,' he said.

'Well, I've come back,' I answered.

'Well, by the honey, England must be a great country,' he marvelled as he pulled me a pint. They'll all be talking now about the great earnings in England that enable people to come home again after a bare seven weeks.

My father and mother got a right start when I walked in the door on them. The old lady started cooking straight away and the old man was tremendously bucked up.

Thank God, the weather is great and looks like continuing. It's nice to see the active young boys playing among themselves out on the grass—a sure sign that the country is not beaten yet. If things improve gradually and if everyone can earn a decent living, we'll have to have plenty of people to enjoy what comfort will be going!

I went to Confession in the Abbey; it was like Heaven inside there were so many candles burning and flowers decorating the altar. Ireland is the most Catholic country in the world; you can be sure of that.

Easter Sunday. A lovely morning, thanks be to God. To Mass

(178) early in the Black Abbey with my mother. The people are lovely and happy here together, greeting each other kindly coming from Mass. It's only an ignorant man that would say life is better over the way, despite the money you can earn.

I met my father after eleven o'clock Mass and we walked down town. A group of cyclists from Dublin came down Patrick Street and stopped for a rest on the Parade. They were happy, loud-voiced, amused by the country people but for all that full of harmless fun. There was a good crowd already there as we made our way into Larry's. Larry and the lads were amazed to see me coming back so soon.

I ate a fine Irish dinner: bacon, cabbage, roast and boiled potatoes with a nice sweet to follow. I was the only one of the family present. Kevin is in Daventry, Noel in Hampshire, Brian in Sussex and Dympna, our only sister, in London. It's the same story in many houses here and, indeed, all over Ireland.

I got out the bike after dinner and went out the Callan road to have a look at the countryside. Spring is in full sway here while it's only the beginning across the water. The little peaks of Tullaroan were on my right hand side, Mount Leinster and the other mountains on my left, all standing out clearly against the background of the sky and directly in front of me, the majestic mass of Sleivenamon, unchanged from the time of Finn MacCool. Round these parts lived Humphrey O'Sullivan, the diarist. He left us an accurate and lively account of the lives of the people here and the doings of his time.

Humphrey always lamented the oppression of the Irish by the English; but in this lovely countryside, the Irish are in command now—those of them that are left. The Irish language has taken itself away from these rich lands—across the Corrib and into the bleak lands of Erris and the islands off the west coast. One man and his few cattle live here where, in O'Sullivan's time, twenty people lived—Irishmen speaking Irish. What could have been better—to give a good livelihood to the people when they were here so that they would have self-respect and treasure their national language, or to try to bring Irish back from the grave so that it can be on Irish lips again?

Gloomy thoughts, and this is Easter, the time of hope and courage; and all I have is two more days before I have to get

(179) back into that tunnel at Rugby. To hell with them for thoughts!

The old lady and myself spent a long time after I came in sitting together talking about life in general. More than anything else, she'd love me to remain at home but I can't.

I spent an hour down at the corner in front of the Savoy after tea. A crowd gathers there every Sunday night to discourse about the world and its ways or to talk about anyone who happens to be passing by. Great fun is had sometimes by one of the playboys imitating the neighbours in a harmless spirit of fun. But that's one of the nice things about the people here—they can see the good side of things always. They all know one another and take a rise out of each other at times.

Like some of the boys who try to sneak into the fourpenny part of the cinema so that those who are up in the one-and-sixpenny part won't know: they wait until the picture has started and then they slip into the cheap place, a handkerchief up to their faces so that they won't be recognized and their lapels turned up. The doorman lets them by and, when they think they're away with it, he roars at the top of his voice:

'Come along, now, gentlemen, no need to hide your features, we all know you. It's no disgrace to go in the fourpennies and I'm sure the fourpence is honestly come by.'

A great roar of joy goes up from the friends of those trying to sneak in; and all the unfortunates can do is to sit with their heads bent down hoping that the fun won't last too long.

I don't know if the same tricking goes on in other Irish towns. Not in Galway, anyhow; but it certainly adds to the fun anywhere.

I didn't bother taking a drink tonight. I walked home at my ease enjoying the healthy night air. I stood at the gate looking up at the stars. It's the same sky that will be over me when I get back to Northampton in a couple of days time—but I feel more natural with it here.

I'm really lucky so far as the weather is concerned anyhow. Today is altogether beautiful and I don't remember when I felt so well.

Myself and the old lad mooched off down town before eleven. People were walking around at their ease and the girls

(180) looked lovely in their summer dresses. The amount of lovely women that are in this town! Times I think it might be nice to settle down and marry one of them. For a man like myself that has reached the age of thirty, it's not at all too soon to be thinking of the like. Indeed, I suppose a lot of us would do it if we could stay at home but what's the good of talking about that? I've often said that it's a good thing to stay in the place in which you were born and where the seven generations before you lived. You'd feel you belonged to the place, that your roots were there, so to speak, instead of feeling like visitors as we do in England. If there was work to be had here, there's not a town in Ireland could compare with it, for they're a generous light-hearted people, the Cats.*

I went up Ormond road during the afternoon on the bike, keeping going for an hour or so until I came to the breen that brings you out at St. Fiachra's Well on the bank of the Nore. They say there's a cure in that water and I remembered that day I went down there hoping that my sight would improve so that I could join the army. It wasn't long since we had come to Kilkenny from Galway and I was heart-broken after the old place. I thought the best way to get back there was to enlist in the First Battalion which was Irish-speaking—up at Renmore. I enlisted all right but not until long after I had been up at St. Fiachra's Well and by that time I was as much in love with Kilkenny as with Galway.

I walked along by the river shoving the bike in front of me until I came to Fennessey's Mill. The weir above the mill was murmuring away sleepily with the whiteness of the spray standing out against the dark waves of the stream. The fresh green leaves of the trees added to the beauty of the place and the old empty skeleton of the mill under its curtain of ivy stood for a way of life that is over for ever. The old wheel won't turn again and nothing will be ground there ever. But people will get pleasure from the sight of it for some time to come and that in itself is something.

Next summer people will come and walk along this way, parents and their children, a young Franciscan brother, boys imagining to themselves that they are wild red Indians, a

*For some reasons, Kilkenny people are known as 'Cats'.

(181) courting couple hand in hand—and the perpetual fishermen. But Joe Soap will be over in the Midlands shovelling and digging away and nothing worth calling a river nearer than a hundred miles to him.

There was a nice crowd in Stephen's place tonight and the pint was magnificent. I met Sean Whelan, my old friend from Ballyfoyle there and we had a good bout of conversation. Paddy Dollart came in too, and we started talking about the time we were working on the railway in Warwickshire. Sonny Campbell came along then to bore us about his job with Wimpey in Stevenage and with his job with McAlpine in Chatham, and about the wealth you can amass from them—you'd think nothing of twenty pounds or anything under it!—but there's no danger that Sonny will move across as long as he can squeeze out the extra day for himself here.

Sometimes, I think he's an agent for some crowd that want to leave this country desolate altogether for he never gets tired of advising people to go across the water and not be wasting their lives here. He's like many others that are lucky enough to be able to stay at home; he likes to be praising the place over the way and running down his own. But what harm? As Sean says: 'You must listen to thunder.'

Tuesday, 23.4.1957. A bit cool today. My father and I spent a couple of hours in Larry's before dinner. There weren't many there; the holiday is over. I savoured the atmosphere of the place to the full: a peaceful quietude and the steady tick-tock of the old-fashioned clock above the bottles on the top shelf, the heavy-sweet smell of the porter and the low voices of the men talking quietly as if they did not wish to break the silence. Larry shook hands with me as I was leaving and wished me a good journey.

I found the time trying while I was hanging around waiting to leave the house. The old lady was very sad even though many's the time before I had gone away. Will anyone ever get used to parting?

Two hours on the train to Dublin. I had a good short holiday and I shouldn't be unhappy. But after all, I envy the cattle lying on the green grass of Ireland gazing cow-like at the

(182) C.I.E.* carriages riding by. But even the cattle are trundled across too, like the Paddies and Brigids of Ireland.

Coming into Dun Laoire, I saw men in white clothes playing cricket and, somehow I felt annoyed. A young man and his girl were walking by themselves down below us in the golden evening sunlight. It's well for you, my friend, that every day you arise can be spent round about this place.

The White Boat** is laden down with people. Most of them, I fancy, like myself, returning after Easter. I can see, too, that others are going across for the first time. On my right, there is a little group from Connemara talking in Irish. If I live at all, surely that's Horse Flaherty down below! If it is, we'll have great sport in no time!

Doesn't Dun Laoire look beautiful with the mountains behind it? The quay is lined with little sailing boats, and wooden rowing boats. The wealthy own them, those who can stay behind here.

And then, without warning, she drifts from the quay. Wasn't I the inattentive one that I didn't see them getting ready? I can sense the old feeling in my stomach that I get each time I leave Irish soil, but it won't last long. I'm getting used to it now.

The Wicklow mountains are on the right, merging into the darkness of the night. Do their colours change, I wonder, like the Twelve Pins.*** The sun has gone down now but there are faint golden rays in the west still. For a minute, I have a vision of Lough Corrib and again I get that sensation in my stomach.

Somewhere around me a man is singing the 'Rose of Tralee.' Someone else yarns.

We're a great people, surely.

- * The National Transport System.
- ** The boat from Dun Laoire to Holyhead.
- *** A range of mountains in Co. Galway.