



FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE

The Trouble with the Irish

Dublin

*I met with Napper Tandy, and he
took me by the hand,
And he said, "How's poor ould
Ireland, and how does she
stand?"*

WELL, SHE'S still standing, though perhaps staggering a bit. The stagger began around about 1922, when she got her partial independence, and since then the country has gradually become almost intolerable as a place where a man of sensitivity can abide at his ease.

During the period when Ireland was being misruled by England, it was quite a pleasant and lively spot. The native Irish were kept away as far as possible from outside influences and were forced backwards towards the Middle Ages. I do not suggest

that there was anything wrong with living in the Middle Ages, nor do I consider as too offensive the picture of Ireland as drawn by sentimental nineteenth century writers — a beautiful green island with thatched cottages, unspoiled colleens and romantic rebels.

It was, of course, essentially a lie but it was kept in circulation by hotel-keepers, jarvies, toppers and English colonels. In a sense it was a flattering, if undignified, conception of the country, but the Irish gave it a twist to suit themselves and played up to the idea when they discovered that it paid good dividends in tourist trade. Besides, the Irish were natural actors and they reveled in playing a comic role. If it made themselves and others laugh and also brought some

money, they were satisfied. But when talking quietly among themselves in a pub they would relax and discuss the relative ease with which one could fool an Englishman and an American. "Of all the furriners it's aiser to cod the Englishman but the Yank is freer with the spondulicks," I often heard it said.

During the past twenty or more years, Ireland has been drifting into a smug system of government which is entirely foreign to the Irish mind. The Irishman needs opposition to feed his emotional temperament, and if he does not get sufficient opposition he becomes flabby and crooked, like Irish-American politicians. There is nothing over here in Ireland worth fighting for or against. The British are down, if not out, and the group which rules in the six northern counties (still held by England) are more comic than offensive.

But there is more vitality in the northern than there is in the southern Irish. Up north they keep a religious war in full swing. On the twelfth of July each year the Protestants all turn out with big drums and march in procession, shouting hatred and defiance at their Catholic neighbors. But even in this part of Ireland there is less

spirit than there used to be. I was in Belfast for the "Twelfth," as they call it, and I noticed that many of the anti-Popery songs have given way to such compositions as, "If I'd known you were coming I'd have baked a cake." As I say, even the fight is going out of the northerners.

What offends most in Ireland is the government. It would seem that, in recent years, every dishonest opportunist around has found his way into the Dáil (our Parliament). Perhaps the reason may be that, owing to the strict emigration laws during the past few years, those Irishmen we would normally export to Chicago were forced to remain in Ireland and, as their natural bent was towards politics and allied fields, they found their way into the government. They have established a new order: Ireland must become respectable. People are expected to keep a crease in their trousers and to learn to drink cocktails in chromium-decorated bars. The Dublin pubs, famous for their witty atmosphere amid the sawdust and spittle, are a thing of the past. When the present owner bought Davy Byrne's pub, made famous by James Joyce in *Ulysses*, he announced that he was going to turn it into a respectable tavern. He carried out this dire threat, with the

result that people of taste cannot now go in there for a quiet drink.

Last week I went down to county Monaghan where I was born. I was sad at the change that had taken place. When I was growing up, the townland was full of children. There were at least five or six in every house. Now, however, there is only one child in an area of about a half-mile radius, and that child's father was over fifty when he married a couple of years ago. There are lots of old forlorn bachelors in the area and they give the place a desolate appearance. They have electricity in the houses but there are no children to benefit by it.

All the youths have fled to the English factories and it is not always easy to save the harvest because of the shortage of help. This year a great part of it was lost but the lack of help was only one cause. It must have been the wettest summer in living memory and as I sat in my Dublin flat I was at least consoled that I had not to worry if my rick of corn was not properly thatched.

In Dublin everything has become precise and correct as far as it is possible to make an Irishman conform to a pattern. The government and the clergy,

both Protestant and Catholic, control every medium of expression and of living in one way or another. To get a job in Dublin is, therefore, most difficult if one has a sense of dignity; one has either to join the Freemasons or its Catholic counterpart, the Knights of Columbanus. It is not easy to become a Knight but, if once in, your future is assured.

There is no television yet in Ireland, which is no loss for, like the Irish radio, it will be controlled directly by a politician, the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, when it does arrive. Almost everyone in Ireland has a radio set but few listen to the Irish radio; instead they listen to the B.B.C. (British Broadcasting Corporation). The Irish radio programs, run entirely by civil servants, are so stupid that many have had their radio sets so arranged that they cannot possibly run into the Irish programs. Half the programs are in the Gaelic language, and since no one would talk or write in Gaelic if he could get a hearing in English, these programs are even more moronic than the ones in the English language. So far we have only got one or two jukeboxes in Dublin, but very soon more will arrive.

Since Mr. De Valera's party was beaten at the elections a

couple of years back, Ireland is ruled by a coalition government of six parties whose only sense of unity is that they all hate Mr. De Valera. De Valera, whether one agrees with him or not, was at least a great figure and a man of courage. His autocratic attitude had something of the artist in it, as when he once pointed out to an opposition speaker in the Dáil that he had only to look into his own heart to see what Ireland needed. The present government is more inclined in similar circumstances to look into someone else's pocket — especially the American pocket. During the last few months the Irish government has been sending all the hotel keepers of Ireland over to America on a costly junket on the pretext of studying American hotel methods. No one can see the sense of it unless it be to flatter the Americans, to court tourist traffic or hope for a further "loan."

The present Minister for External Affairs is Mr. Sean McBride, son of Maud Gonne, who was admired so much by that great poet, W. B. Yeats. He was born and reared in France but, worse still, he has the dangerous delusion that he is Ireland's man of destiny. Though once a revolutionary, now that he is in control there is no hope of a

revolution. He visualizes himself as a leader of Ireland at world councils. The only real Irish trait he possesses is that of taking himself and Ireland very seriously.

When McBride got his present job, he announced that Ireland was in future to cast aside her comic cloak and that the ideals of her great men, Yeats, Synge and the rest, must be propagated. He would institute a Department of Fine Arts. Eventually he established a Cultural Committee. Irish writers were delighted at this brave gesture and looked forward with enthusiasm towards a bright future. They were not without their suspicions, however. They could see, too, that he was careful to praise only the dead. Still, there were hopes that Ireland's men of genius would be recalled home and given sinecures. When the Cultural Committee took shape, however, the only people appointed to it were Civil Servants and second-rate writers who were well in with the politicians and the clergy. They made a film on the life of Yeats but so far it has not been shown in Ireland, though it has been tried out on the defenseless Icelanders.

A further sidelight on modern Irish "culture" was the sending to the International Exhibition

in Venice, as representatives of Irish art, the two painters — both women — who are conceded generally to be Ireland's worst painters. Of Ireland's serious painters there are three: one spends most of his time at the racetrack punting; another is submerged and discouraged by a teaching job; and the third is constantly drunk, trying to forget his studio and his wife.

It may seem less peculiar, then, that most of Ireland's best artists and writers have to flee the country. The reason is not the much talked of censorship of books, but rather the problem of making a living. A man with an independent mind cannot get a job in Ireland. If an employer braver than the rest suggests that he might give him a job, he is sure to be warned by a politician or clergyman that the man is dangerous. He never gets the job. Once a man is blackballed he will be unemployed forever in Ireland.

This is one reason why there is so much frustration in Dublin. A man of ideas must go out of the country or risk the alternative of going out of his mind. Bernard Shaw, James Stephens, Liam O'Flaherty, Sean O'Casey, James Joyce — exiles all. Most of the writers go to London. Few go to America because experience has taught

them that those who do go there often turn into what they call "stage-Irish Yankee windbags."

There is little social life in Ireland. The wealthy political businessmen go to the races on a Saturday and swagger around praising jockeys and looking affluent. The rest go to the films and, though there are over a hundred cinemas in Dublin, they are all packed to the doors every night and many have to be turned away. All the films are American and British; there is no Irish film industry. Someone in Ireland did make a film but it was so bad that one film critic described it as "a form of torture to which Stalin's attention should be drawn." The Abbey Theatre is, of course, in the deepest degradation, partly controlled by the government. The dance halls are also crowded every night of the week by men and women seeking recreation. Marriages in Ireland are few and far between and the dance hall is the next best thing.

The Dublin pubs also are crowded every night and one has to push hard to get near the bar. Women as well as men now drink in the pubs to the ruin of the pubs and themselves. Night clubs are not permitted, and that is no loss.

The literary center of Ireland is London, but if one happens to find himself as a visitor to Dublin, he might drop in on the Pearl Bar some Friday evening. There he will find most of the spiritually broken-down writers, the phonies, the journalists and the sycophants — all clustered in one spot. Austin Clark will be there, dressed like the picture of a New England Puritan; Francis McManus, the novel-a-year man; Robaird O'Farachain (Robert Farren), who writes bad verse by the ream; and of course many others of the same calibre. In the centre of this group sits Bertie Smyllie, editor of the *Irish Times*, his

large body overflowing the chair and his ear cocked for a word of flattery. Sean O'Faolain (John Whelan) tries to run a special session of his own out in the suburbs.

Yesterday I walked up the Dublin mountains, away from the petty squabbles of the city, and looked around. All the memories of ancient Ireland seemed to rush upon me — her kings, her battles and her mythology. Away to the north was Howth Head, famous in all the Irish sagas, and I could not but reflect that though Ireland's men may stumble and fall her hills and legends sustain her.

— PETER KAVANAGH

*Peter Kavanagh is a County Monaghan man. He was at one time a professional boxer and also a shoemaker. He strayed from these trades, however, and became a college professor and a writer. Devin Adair just brought out his latest book, *The Story of the Abbey Theatre*.*

Crime Goes Bourgeois

Paris

OVER HALF THE inventions at the recent French inventors' show were devices to protect the public against crooks. With British jails bursting, there has been a demand in the House of Lords for the restoration of flogging. In Rome the Pope has exhorted Holy Year pilgrims to pray for a world "almost uni-

versally flooded with moral decadence," and the Vatican has ordered the excommunication of priests who indulge in private commercial speculation.

In England armed robbery is up fourfold; smuggling is up seventyfold; murder is up fivefold; crimes by women and children have doubled since 1938; and a third of all larceny cases involve children under