

Irish Magic

MOURNING BECAME MRS. SPEND-LOVE. By Oliver St. John Gogarty. New York: Creative Age Press. 1948. 250 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by HARRISON SMITH

DR. GOGARTY of Dublin and New York has as many facets as a diamond. He is a poet, novelist, and essayist, a surgeon, a wit, and a raconteur; and, since he is an Irishman, he has been involved in partisan politics most of his life. As he approaches his seventieth year, his recollections are invaluable as literary history and as a last, nostalgic view of the men and events that created the Irish literary renaissance. His latest book is evidence that he carries his historical burden so lightly that he is in no danger of becoming a national monument to the past.

"Mourning Became Mrs. Spendlove" is an intensely amusing series of stories, portraits, and reminiscences. If the reader is not interested in his accounts of James Joyce or Yeats, then to amuse him there is the genteel story of the lady street-walker who went about her business dressed in mourning, or the tale of the elderly bank director who became involved in a house-of-call because he did not realize why the younger women at the weekly bridge parties he attended were always suddenly leaving and later returning to their tables. There is another politely ribald story of a New England clergyman who became in an odd and highly scientific way the father of his village.

These and other stories in the volume are fiction that might have been written by anyone with a sense of humor and a gift for slightly acid satire. But nobody but Gogarty could have written the chapters on Dublin and the haunting countryside that borders that ancient and most civilized city, or the memorable studies of Robert Flaherty, Yeats, and Joyce scattered through the book.

It seems that Dr. Gogarty riding a Dublin tramcar met young James Joyce one day carrying a bundle of manuscript poems under his arm. In a short time he was living with him in the single room of an abandoned tower on Dublin Bay. In those days Joyce was wholly concerned with creating in his own mind the involved and contorted meanings and the multitude of characters who throng that extraordinary novel, "Ulysses." He was catching from the very air phrases, sounds, and visions as naturally as a dog snaps at flies. The doctor and throat specialist found himself dwelling uncomfortably with genius incarnate, and it says a great deal for him,

and for Joyce too, that either of them was able to live in any harmony with the other. Gogarty, realizing that Joyce was with some malice transforming him into the character who was to be Malachi Mulligan in the novel, was in a quandary. He had no doubt that he was contributing to a masterpiece and would have agreed with Yeats when he later wrote, "The Martello Tower pages [in "Ulysses"] are full of beauty, a cruel, playful mind like a great, soft tiger cat." Gogarty recalls some of his ponderings at the time:

"Why do I put up with him at all?" I asked myself. It must be the attraction of opposites that holds us together. But he is a bit of a weight. It is hard to make him smile except at some blunder of mine or others. Here I am with two mad men in the Tower. Am I their keeper or companion? Then there is the fact that Endymion, the madman, likes only me . . . Kinch [Joyce] calls me Malachi Mulligan. 'Malachi wore the collar of gold,' and he is envious of my canary-colored waistcoat with the gold buttons. Besides 'Malachi' is his way of hinting 'Mercury,' and 'Mulligan' is stage Irish for me and for the rest of us. It is meant to make me absurd . . ."

On another page you will find the farcical account of their binge in Dublin one night and their visit to the empty and bleak meeting rooms of AE's "Hermitic Society," where the great Russell talked literature to a crowd of girls working in a Quaker

dry-goods store, and where they found the sample case of Joyce's publisher which should have contained books instead of "lady's drawers." In the chapter "Reminiscences of Yeats," Gogarty recalls Joyce's rude meeting with one of the greatest of poets. Yeats was celebrating his fortieth birthday, and Joyce left his companion to rush into the hotel.

"What did he say?" Gogarty asked him later.

"He told me that he was forty."

"And what did you say?"

"I said, 'I am sorry. You are too old for me to help. Good-by.'"

Gogarty believes that Yeats's association with the occult retarded the acceptance of the dramatic movement in Ireland, but that his involvement with mysticism through seances, astrology, and the plain quackery of magic was an effort to tap through mysticism the subconscious stream of inspiration. He recalls the sight of Yeats while he was composing:

With his hands behind his back, his head down, or suddenly looking up, he would pace the floor, humming to himself until the poem rose from the rich darkness within him. . . . As the rhythm-wedded words came, he wrote them in pencil on odd pieces of paper. I found many of them in my study when he had finished his poems.

In "Dublin Revisited II" Gogarty explains his own belief in the supernatural, at least the evidences of it in his own country. While he was driving in Phoenix Park, he once saw a ghost, a horseman, complete with



bowler hat, riding coat, and checkered waistcoat. The mischievous leprechaun dressed in leather, gaily colored, is, he believes "the little Laplander, 'Lap-rechaun'" who was brought to Denmark out of the Arctic before the Danes settled in Ireland, "leaving so strong a memory that they can be seen now at propitious moments between the light and the dark." As for the little folk, the fairies, they are there too if you have the insight to see them. He once met a serious composer who was writing an opera and had come to remote Iol Daitthe (wherever that may be) for a practical reason. He was waiting to hear the enchanted airs of fairy music since those who had heard them were not educated enough to take them down. Yeats was furious with Gogarty once when he told him of the fishermen he had interviewed who had seen a merman off the coast of Connemara standing waist high in eight feet of water, so close at hand that they could have lifted him into their boat. Gogarty thought it might be a manatee. "I am amazed at you," Yeats shouted. "Why will people (even you) insist on reducing everything under heaven to narrow reason's scope?" There are other marvels to which the talented doctor bears witness, including a huge mammal on the coast of Wales, covered with dark red hair and adorned with a proboscis instead of tusks and short limbs with claws like an alligator. What can a mere American do in the face of Irishmen who have seen fairies, leprechauns, and unknown monsters? When Yeats lectured over here, someone in the audience usually asked him if he had seen a fairy. He replied by shouting, "What? Over here?" There is no answer to that, except an envious prayer that they may come over here some day, to raise our spirits by a faith in other creatures than the magic-makers and inventors of machinery and bombs.

Foretaste

By Joseph Francis Murphy

THE WAR was over, and we were still at sea,
And the captain was proud; proud of his ship and men.
But he did a thing that closed a door on me
When he passed the word that the brass must shine again.

The battle paint of the top-side brass must go,
So the seamen scraped, and the very young seemed glad.
The captain was pleased to see things shining so,
But his face resembled the long, gray days we'd had.

A door was closed, and another door swung out,
And the brass was shined, and the sun could have her fling.
That was our warning, then, of the raucous shout
Of the postwar world and its unremembering.

Science and Society.

Science has indeed penetrated every aspect of society, but society has used it blindly, at random, with no sense of responsibility or purpose. In the uneasy no-man's-land between the pure sciences and the humanities, the new social sciences have burgeoned—a mating of scientific method with traditional thinking. Byproducts of the development of science have given us everything from hybrid corn to the atom bomb, from management studies to frozen foods. Such haphazard developments need to be understood before they can be controlled in the interests of mankind. Fortunately, the great British scientists—Eddington, Jeans, Huxley—have been ready to explain to the layman in lucid prose what science is all about. We review here Sir James Jeans's last book—and two studies illustrating the application of science in the diverse fields of agriculture and social relations.

History of Ideas

THE GROWTH OF PHYSICAL SCIENCE. By Sir James Jeans. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1948. 346 pp. \$4.

Reviewed by LOUIS N. RIDENOUR

SIR JAMES H. JEANS, who died in September 1946, in this, his final book, sustains the incomparable reputation he enjoys as a clear and interesting writer for the layman with an interest in science. Macmillan now publishes the first American edition of Sir James's history of science, whose British edition appeared in 1947, and whose proofs he corrected just before his death.

The aim of the book is admirably stated in the brief preface:

I have felt no ambition (nor competence) to add to [the professional histories of science now in existence], but I have thought that I might usefully try to describe the main lines of advance of physical science, including astronomy and mathematics but excluding all points and side-issues, in language non-technical enough to be understood by readers who

have no scientific attainments or knowledge.

Now it is undeniably true that the reader's appreciation of a book such as this is conditioned to a large extent by his knowledge of the matters with which the author deals. The completely non-technical reader is as apt to be pleased by a penny-dreadful style and a complete absence of scientific reliability as he is to enjoy the measured periods and the impeccable fact that Jeans offers. For this reason I am incompetent to review the book I am now telling you about. I am, or have recently been, a practicing physical scientist; and I am therefore critical of the compromises with the truth that may be made in the writing of a popular book on science. When these compromises do not exist, or are unimportant, I am pleased and enthusiastic; when there are many of them I am inclined to feel that the author might better stick to confessed fiction. I have little judgment of what may engage the lively interest of the lay reader. I hope that, other things being equal, the lay reader will be better pleased with a good scientific job than a bad one; but there are plenty of examples of popular books full of questionable science to make me doubt that this will be so.

Jeans has, as usual, done a splendid job from my parochial standpoint. He was a scientist, and a great one. He also had the gift of being able to write in a clear and interesting way. His interests were more eclectic than those of most scientists of our day, and he was therefore better able to generalize for the non-specialist than most of the other scientists of his generation could do.

In this book he has written a sort of history of ideas, from the remote beginnings of organized knowledge