

Ben Mayo: Public Opinions 1943-1945

Frank O'Connor

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The article, *High Moral Standard Is Essential For Deputies*, 1945-01-07, was missing from the archive and thus not included in the collection.

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Irish Ruins Shocked Visitors

1943-03-28

The announcement in the "Sunday Independent" that Padraig Pearse's cottage at Rosmuck, Connemara, is to be safeguarded and made a National Monument was welcome news. Ireland is far behind other countries in the preservation of national monuments. Just before the war I visited a few of the ruined abbeys and castles of England. Many of the abbey churches were little better than plans, for the walls had been razed within a few feet of the ground, but everywhere you looked they were beautifully kept; the grass was mown; each portion of the building was neatly marked, and even the most casual visitor could scarcely fail to bring away a vivid picture of the life in a mediaeval monastery or castle.

It is true, each visit cost me sixpence, but I felt it was sixpence very well spent.

Now In Decay

How differently, I thought, we treat our national monuments! Some of our abbeys are architectural masterpieces; many of them are still almost complete, and the majority are in a remarkably good state of preservation, but it would be a very determined student who persevered in examining them.

They are, I believe, invariably the gloomiest places in the district, full of ancient tombs overgrown with nettles and weeds. No attempt is made to indicate the original layout of the buildings, so unless the visitor arrives complete with ground plan, his time, from the educational point of view, is wasted.

Little attempt is made to make them attractive to visitors, and Americans in particular have expressed themselves as scandalised by some of the things they have seen in buildings consecrated to religion. In Athenry, for instance, the beautiful west window has been blocked up to provide a ball alley for the town. In Ullard a ball alley has actually been built on to the old church of St. Fiachra. Kells (Co. Kilkenny) has gone one better for there the very sanctuary has been built up and you can play handball over the carved tombs before the High Altar

Cahir Castle

Of course, some of our national monuments, mostly in private hands, have been well preserved. There is Cahir Castle, which it is a pleasure to visit, and the ruins on the Dunraven Estate at Adare are preserved as admirably as every other amenity in that enchanting village.

But I remember with anything but pleasure my last visit to the fine old church of Tomgraney, which goes back to the boyhood of Brian Boru and where he must often have knelt. This seems to me the very worst form of national propaganda. Whatever else the foreign visitor sees, he is almost bound to pay a visit to some of these ruins, and from them he can only carry away a most unfortunate impression.

Recently I discussed all this with a famous Irish painter. "It is an extraordinary thing," he said. "But what is still more extraordinary is that we spend great sums on building modern churches when for half the money we could rebuild a mediæval masterpiece."

My friend the painter set me thinking, and within an hour I had recollected scores of Irish towns and villages which, for a comparatively small outlay, could rid themselves of an unsightly mass of ruins and provide themselves with a fitting parish church. One has only to think again of the beauty of Adare, where both Catholic and Protestant churches are what were once ruined monasteries and where, I am glad to hear, a famous mediæval scholar has been asked to advise on the re-decoration of the Catholic church.

The Augustinians in Fethard and the Dominicans in Kilkenny have set a fine example by converting ruined buildings, but the astonishing fact remains that though there are infinitely finer buildings to work on, nobody has followed their example.

Merely from the point of view of tourist traffic, this is sufficiently deplorable, for your average visitor prefers to see a church which is still part of the everyday life of the people to a ruin, no matter how beautifully it is kept. But from the worshipper's point of view the loss is no less serious. Not only is there the inherent sanctity and dignity of a building where his ancestors for hundreds of years before him have worshipped, but the instruction and inspiration to be derived from kneeling among beautiful surroundings

So, on every account, let us have a Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings!

Sunday Independent, 28 March, 1943

Why Not Homes, As Well As Pensions, For Ministers?

1943-04-11

Two items appear in the news this week that seem to bear no particular relation to one another. One is the admission of the decline in the membership of the Civil Defence services, coupled with the usual suggestion of compulsion. The other is Mr. Norton's protest against pensions for Ministers. At first sight, they seem to be two entirely different questions, yet they have one thing in common. That is the issue of national service. Why, Mr. Norton asked, should Ministers who had given a few years' service to the State and suffered no financial loss by it be rewarded with pensions of £500 a year for life? Nobody, of course, would propose that in a poor country like ours, a man who had given the best years of his life to the public service should be treated worse than any other public servant and dismissed in his old age to poverty. But that is not quite the same thing as a professional or business man who has spent a few years in office and then goes back to his work with a handsome unearned income. Why must a poor man be compelled to perform a public duty and a politician be rewarded with a pension for life for doing his?

They Seek The Work

And it is not as though the Minister's work were distasteful. At least, the number of politicians who fight shy of it must be very small, much smaller than the number of them who go through life with a grievance because they have never held office. Ministers are notoriously shut off more than any other class of men from public opinion. Public opinion on this particular question is very obvious.

Mr. Norton points out that a Minister retiring at the age of 45, on an average expectation of life will draw £10,000 of public money.

One Balkan State, acting on the same happy-go-lucky principle as seems to have motivated our own Government, provided free villas for its Ministers. As a politician needed to be only three months a Minister in order to qualify for a Ministerial residence, the result was a hasty succession of Cabinets and the rapid growth of a whole suburb of fine Ministerial villas.

And, after all, why not homes as well as pensions for our Governments? Neither will bankrupt the State.

What they will bankrupt is the people's confidence in popular Government, and that, for us, is a much more serious matter.

"Little Man" Citizen

Again, we must be careful not to indulge in Utopianism. That, too, leads to cynicism, but by a different road. Politics, like every other human activity, is a mixed business. But at the same time we must remember that there is a great difference between Democracy and other forms of government. These have behind them armed force, tradition, pageantry and titles; they can afford to be cynical and even corrupt and still merit devotion.

Democracy has none of these things. It is a slow, laborious, clumsy, expensive method of administration. Anyone who has ever sat on a committee must have felt that he himself could have got through ten times the work in half the time. Perhaps he could—but then it would not have been Democracy. It would have been compulsion; it might have been tyranny. The great virtue of Democracy is that it is an attempt at practical justice; it is the government of the Little Man and it stands or falls by his verdict.

The Little Man, who, when his day's work is done, attends a St. Vincent de Paul meeting, a library meeting; who organises football matches, amateur theatricals or fire drill; who writes to the paper to draw attention to some abuse—he is Democracy in practice. And the Little Man will not pull his weight unless he feels that the Big Men are giving him a fair deal and not merely using their positions to provide themselves with villas or pensions. The trouble in Ireland is that the Little Man is no longer pulling his weight. He is asking himself: "What exactly am I pulling for?"

When that happens. Democracy is in danger. Will Mr. Norton give a lead by pledging himself and his Party not to accept Ministerial pensions?

Sunday Independent, 11 April, 1943

Crime Waves And Nonsense Waves

1943-04-18

I can imagine only one danger more serious for the future of the country than the crime wave. That is Dáil Eireann's reaction to it.

The facts are simple enough for any human being to grasp. In 1938 indictable crimes reported numbered 6,769. By 1938 they had jumped to 8,202, by 1940 to 9,014, by 1941 to 13,180, and by 1942 they had reached the alarming total of 17,322, almost three times the figure of five years ago.

What they will be for the current year one scarcely likes to think. Theft in one form or another constituted the greater part of the increase, and sixty per cent of the crimes were committed in the Dublin area.

Now, what were the reactions of Government and Dáil? The Minister for Justice said the explanation might be found in shortage of commodities, not in a loosening of morals. A prominent Opposition member, who said that "one cause of crime was shortage of materials." expressed himself "surprised that so many people had remained honest despite the temptations there were in traffic of what might be called shortages." The traffic across the Border, he added, had a demoralising effect on the people. The Minister agreed with this as with the Opposition member's suggestion that the reporting of crimes led weak-minded people astray. A Labour member went so far as to say that "people on low wages had the choice of being dishonest or being hungry." And a well-known Dublin deputy added the suggestion that stage shows should be censored.

Ask The Schoolmasters!

To deal first with the inevitable red herring, too many people in Ireland have an incurable tendency to blame all the country's troubles on books, newspapers, films and plays. But I think every schoolmaster will agree that it is not the boy who reads "bloods" who develops into the habitual criminal. It is the boy who doesn't read at all.

That is as true of adults as it is of children. Our grandfathers, who were less mealy-mouthed about crime than we are, never pretended it was the result of too much education. They believed it was due to idleness, ignorance, drink, and gambling. Yet if you search the newspaper reports you will find no reference to any of these things. You might even gather the impression that Ireland was a country where people worked far too hard and were far too highly educated: where drink was unknown, and where nobody would even understand the meaning of the word gambling. Instead of that, you will find public men seriously proposing as a cure for crime that it should not be reported in the newspapers. As everybody knows, there are certain crimes which, in the interests of public decency, are never reported, but nobody in his senses believes that on that account they do not exist or that it acts as an effective check on them. The contrary would be far nearer the truth. One of the few things we can still boast of is that with us publicity is still a deterrent.

Loose Thinking.

And now let us look again at the statements I have quoted. The Minister for Justice is reported to have said the explanation might be found in a shortage of commodities not in a loosening of morals. In other words, that the embezzler's crime was due to a shortage of cash and not to a lack of principle! This is surely extraordinary thinking. But is it any more extraordinary than that of the Opposition member who, having first cited smuggling as a cause of crime (and forgotten to explain why 60 per cent of the crime took place in the capital instead of on the Border), then went on to say that he was surprised that so many people had remained honest despite the temptation. Despite the temptation, mark you! As

though he had ever, heard of such a thing as honesty without temptation, and as though the whole aim of character building were not to make a man resist temptation! That is an extraordinary statement for any public man to make, but even more extraordinary was the Labour deputy's suggestion that people with low wages had no choice but to be dishonest or go hungry.

If it is really true that there is such an unequal distribution of commodities as to leave honourable men with no alternative but to take the law into their own hands, that is indeed a terrible indictment of the Government. But is it true? If the unjust profits of the Black Market are so gross an abuse that they constitute an incitement to anarchy, that, too, is a grave reflection on the Government. But are they?

Women's Handbags Snatched

Are the men who prowl about the streets at night and snatch old women's handbags really honest workmen who have no other choice but starvation? Or are members of the Dáil using the present emergency as an excuse for their own incompetence and inability to face the facts? If this is what we must expect in a mere shortage of commodities, then God help us in a real crisis!

The members of the Dáil might, to begin with, call things by their real names. They might then consider whether the crime wave is not a clear indication that we have failed in education and are producing men and women who are not equipped for the battle of life: who do not know the meaning of industry, thrift, honesty and truthfulness.

Sunday Independent, 18 April, 1943

Pensions For Great Writers: Finland's Plan

1943-04-25

What! More Pensions? That, no doubt, is how many readers must have greeted the proposal for Civil List pensions "for writers, actors, artists, scientists, musicians, and other distinguished personages (or their dependants)." We are almost becoming resigned to pensions. We have pensioned off two rival armies and their female auxiliaries, and one of these days we must pension off our second Government. Why not the writers and artists?

Actually there is a good deal to be said for the proposal, but emphatically it is not the case made by the speakers at the Dublin P.E.N. Club. "One of the most pathetic things in the world," declared one speaker, "was the old singer or the wornout actor or actress who had spent the best years of their lives in giving pleasure to others." But why the singer or the actor? Why not the worn-out clerk or the worn-out charwoman?

If the only argument for an Irish Civil List were a competition in lachrymosity, there are far greater objects for our pity in the Dublin slums than among the ranks of writers and actors.

All that such a case amounts to is one for a regular contributory scheme of pensions which might be drawn up by any association like W.A.A.M.A. It is certainly not a case for State interference; and if it were to be embodied in the form of a Civil List it would simply inflict another onerous and useless burden of doles on a State which is already cursed with so many forms of pauperisation. And it would do nothing whatever for the arts or sciences.

"The Real Case"

The real case for a Civil List is a matter of cold-blooded self-interest. The fact is that writers and artists whose names are known outside their own countries usually are assets whose value can be assessed in hard cash. For one person in the U.S.A. who knows the name of the Irish Representative in Washington (do you yourself know it?), thousands know the names of John McCormack and Sean O'Casey.

Every civilised Government openly or secretly, directly or indirectly [advances] the cultural work of its own nationals and cashes in on the royalties, the employment afforded [to printers] and others, the tourist [traffic and] the influence they wield in educated society. We alone (thanks partly to the cussedness of the writers themselves) do not cash in, and as a result we come in abroad for a great deal of virulent and unjustified abuse as a nation which banishes or persecutes its intelligentsia. This, whatever our justification, is simply not good international business. In a moment of crisis, when we should be entirely dependent on international good-will, it might prove to be very bad [...] British and not the Irish Government.

If the Government, as was suggested at the P.E.N. Club meeting, is seriously considering a proposal by which pensions would be given to our great men of letters, there are two possible methods. One is that of the British Government which grants pensions only to the most distinguished writers. The pensions are usually very small, so they rarely attract publicity and excite neither enmities nor heart burnings. We have very few such international figures; the names which occur to me might be reckoned on the fingers of one hand and some of these would neither require nor accept assistance

The other, and better, method is that of Finland. There the young artist is given a tiny pension which is in reality a form of travelling scholarship, and the State then washes its hands of him.

If he does not make good, at least he has had his opportunity, and if, like Sibelius, he does make good, his work repays many times over what the State has spent on his artistic education.

It has the advantage over the British method that it creates artists, while the other merely assists those who have already arrived. For a small and poor country, where young men and women must hesitate before embarking on the most uncertain of careers, it is the only method which provides real stimulus and encouragement.

Sunday Independent, 25 April, 1943

Save Our Old Mansions From The Speculators

1943-05-09

A letter in the "Irish Independent" has drawn attention to something which is now becoming quite a serious matter for all of us. The writer of the letter points out that "one by one throughout the country many old houses of historic and architectural interest are tumbling before the hammers of the house-breakers and otherwise falling into ruin, and tracts of our countryside of archaeological and scenic appeal are being relentlessly desecrated," and goes on to propose the formation of an Irish National Trust "whose object would be to preserve for the nation those unspoilt and unshattered remnants of our heritage before it is too late."

These may seem strong words, but in fact they understate the immediacy and gravity of the position.

For years before the war the Irish big houses had been white elephants to their owners. They were either allowed to fall into decay or maintained at a serious sacrifice. There was even a time when one could buy a historic mansion for a song.

Now, however, with the shortage of materials, these great houses have become gold mines, not indeed to their unfortunate owners but to speculators in building materials.

The speculator can still buy a Big House for the price of a moderate-sized villa in a Dublin suburb. He then proceeds to tear it asunder for the valuable quantities of lead, slates, and timber it contains, and, having made a handsome profit, leaves the neighbourhood with a derelict house and stables which are an eyesore.

Even in the past week I have seen the process at work. A Munster village which I had known for years as one of the pleasantest spots in Ireland was visited by the speculators. On the hill overlooking the village there used to be a handsome house with its stables and lodges lining the main road.

When I saw it a few days ago it looked as if it had been subjected to an intensive air bombardment with four thousand pound bombs.

The local authority has the legal power to make the house-breakers clear up the ruins they have created but outside Co. Dublin that power seems never to have been exercised. If the house had been a document it would have been rescued from the pulping machinery by the vigilant officials of the National Library. Because it was a mere mansion it could be destroyed like that, out of hand, without reference to a soul. That is happening all over Ireland, and if it continues for another year it will be disastrous.

National Trust

I think the writer of the letter is wrong in denouncing the "vandalism" of the house-breakers. They are simply obeying the ordinary laws of demand and supply. I think he is right in proposing the formation of an Irish National Trust to acquire houses like this for the nation, whether the nation wants them or not at the moment. (Some weeks ago I urged the formation of such a Trust.) All democratic forms of government fail in initiative, and direction can only come from specialised bodies looking after the general interest.

A Trust like this would have saved us Lady Gregory's house in Co. Galway which, in years to come, would have become a mecca for tourists.

But the real blame for the immediate danger falls on a system of uncoordinated Government or Government-controlled departments, which are all at sixes and sevens. On the one hand we have the Irish Tourist Association carrying out a very important survey of existing objects of historic and architectural interest while demolition is going on at a rate that will make the survey as up-to-date as a census of the time of Queen Anne. We have the Board of Works, which is nominally responsible for the preservation of buildings of architectural and historic interest, but the Board of Works seems blissfully unaware that there was any

history later than the thirteenth century. On the other hand, we have our building schemes and the pressing need for supplies.

Like A Desert

What are we to do? Obviously no Big House should ever be destroyed, except on licence, and the Board of Works and the Tourist Board should make up their minds at once about which of the Big Houses should be preserved and which could be spared to the housebreakers. And when they had made up their minds, and a licence had been issued for the destruction of a building, it should be the duty of the Department of Local Government to see that the law was complied with and that the speculators were compelled to clear away the ruins they had created.

If we continue as we are going, in a hopeless muddle of departmental bungling and indifference, we shall leave the countryside a desert which no Tourist Board for all its millions can ever make attractive even to those who have to live in it.

Sunday Independent, 8 May, 1943.

Radio Eireann Banned “Foreign” Dance Music

1943-05-16

I hope it will be recorded in the history books of the future that in the week just passed, while the world held its breath in expectation of the invasion of Europe, while Ireland prepared for a General Election which might decide its future for the next five years, and while the people of Dublin formed queues to secure a few potatoes for their mid-day meal, the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs banned the broadcasting of “foreign” dance music from Radio Eireann.

Let the historian add without comment that in the same week his colleague, the Minister for Finance, chided the public for expecting the Government to interfere too much in its concerns! Comment will be superfluous.

But let us say by way of explanation to our imaginary historian of the future that we were not alone in our absurdities and that there was nothing particularly Irish about them.

If we could recall a typical distinguished member of the Irish Parliamentary Party of twenty-five years ago and put him sitting cheek by jowl with our present-day politicians while they solemnly debated the banning of “foreign” dance music, he would be just as shocked as any historian of the future could be. He would lay a restraining hand on the Minister’s shoulder and say, “But, my dear fellow, you simply can’t do such things. Just fancy what people in America will think!” Undoubtedly, the Irish Party had its faults. We saw them all more clearly twenty-five years ago. But it was also the product of its time, and whatever it did was done with full awareness of the effect it was likely to have not only on opinion at home, but on the opinion of America, England and Europe.

New Small States

The break-up of the Europe the Irish Party knew spelt the temporary eclipse of the sort of mind they represented. The peace saw the establishment all over Europe of small States, our own amongst them. Liberal-minded people everywhere hoped that these small States, granted political liberty, might develop into contented, prosperous, highly-educated communities. They were doomed to disillusionment. For the most part, the new States were governed by revolutionaries, and all revolutionaries are theorists at heart.

The theorists immediately began by accentuating every possible national difference between themselves and their neighbours. If they had a minority they silenced it, in the interests of national unity. If they had a second language they suppressed it. If they had any industry worth mentioning, they erected tariff barriers to protect it. They either laid claim to a bit of territory which their neighbours possessed or refused to part with a bit that their neighbours coveted. And all of them went on behaving as if they had nothing in common with the rest of Europe until common disaster overwhelmed them all.

We have behaved in something of the same way. For twenty odd years we have seen everything our friend from the Irish Parliamentary Party would have considered normal and reasonable turned upside down. We, too, have behaved as though Europe did not exist. Indeed, some language enthusiast recently asked. “But is there such a thing as Europe?” A week or two ago only a Judgment of the Supreme Court saved us from educational conscription, which could have prevented parents from sending their children to English boarding schools and Belgian convents.

The Waltz Crisis

A few weeks before that the decision of a handful of university students to waltz on St. Patrick’s Night was treated almost as though it were an international crisis. Now comes the decision to ban “foreign” dance music on the air. It is not a question of whether you prefer

croons or cronauns, waltzes or eight-hand reels, Soccer or Gaelic; whether or not you think it snobbish to send children abroad to be educated. It is simply and solely whether it is the business of a responsible Government to erect such trifles into articles of faith; to tell you what books you must read, what steps you must dance, what music you must listen to and where and how your children shall be educated—chiding you, of course, at the same time for not being sufficiently self-reliant and expecting it to interfere in everything!

To-day it has become a matter of urgency to put some check on our theorists, for the twenty years interregnum of minor nationalisms is over and done with. All over Europe to-day there are hopeful politicians who still think in terms of the last war and the last peace; who still hope for a Peace Conference which will enable them to compel a few hundred thousand more of their neighbours to croon *Taimse im chola* and dance eight-hand reels, or whatever the local equivalents may be.

We may be quite certain that none of them will ever see that day.

One Irish student of affairs put his finger on it when he prophesied last week that the post-war world would be very hard on small nations. Any study of contemporary opinion in any of the belligerent nations will reveal that the idea of the small sovereign self-contained State has gone by the board. Even in America one observer has noted that the map which showed the continent cut off by two great expanses of water has given place to the Polar projection, which shows nothing but the Behring Straits between Norway and Patagonia, and that the old isolationist spirit, bred on the first map, is giving way to a new crusading spirit which, in the words of Mr. Sumner Welles, recognises only “the frontiers of human welfare.”

It is plain that we are facing an age of world politics. Ireland can exist in that age only if the General Election throws up some men capable of diverting their minds from the problems of saving Ireland from the crooners and of turning their attention to the problem of saving Ireland from unemployment, agricultural disorganisation, an impractical system of education, and bad social conditions.

Sunday Independent, 16 May, 1943

The Clare People Need Books!

1943-05-23

A correspondent has sent me two interesting cuttings. One, from the Boston Catholic paper, "The Pilot," contains an editorial appeal for more books for the American forces. The other, a letter from a provincial newspaper, attacks the Clare County Library, which, according to the writer, is supported out of county rates although 97 p.c. of the population make no use of it. I have no doubt both campaigns will be partially successful: the American forces will get more books and some advocates of economy will try to ensure that the people of Clare get less.

Yet Heaven knows the people of Clare need books a great deal more than the American forces need them. They are the most important of all channels of communication.

Nowadays, the prosperous community is the educated community, and the educated community is that where people read most.

I have never seen those pathetic processions of young men from Kerry and Connemara carrying their suitcases through Dublin on their way to the Holyhead boat without reflecting that they are almost as badly adapted for the modern industrial world as their ancestors of a hundred years ago. Yet, if one-tenth of the money that has been wasted on impractical methods of education had been spent on equipping their little bog and mountain schoolhouses with libraries, they might have grown up with some understanding of social and economic forces instead of being what they are: mere coolie labour, blown hither and thither in economic storms.

Only Partly True

If, as the writer in the "Limerick Leader" says, only three per cent, of the population of Clare make use of the County Library, that may be an argument for a wholesale evacuation of Clare to some county rather nearer the capital, or it may be an argument for quadrupling the library rate. It is not an argument against the Library. It is not enough to say that people interested in books can get them by post from the Central Library for Students. That admirable institution is all right for the student who wants a particular technical work so badly that he is prepared to write for it, wait perhaps months for it, parcel it up and send it back when he has read it and pay postage both ways, Only a small minority of us want our books as badly as all that!

The writer makes out a far better case when he says that readers can get all they want from the small commercial libraries in tobacconists' shops. This is only partly true. Readers as a rule can only get an indifferent selection of cheap fiction, much of it "remaindered" as unsaleable by its publishers, but the main charge is true enough. Whenever I look over the shelves of a circulating library in a country village I wonder what the County Library can show which is as attractive and as likely to induce the habit of reading. One hour a week in the local school where a devoted and unpaid national teacher opens the book box and offers you the choice of somebody's "Life of Machiavelli" and a book on "Diseases of Horses"?

Undoubtedly, the Irish library system is not what it might be. To begin with, it is responsible to the Department of Local Government, while the other great modern system of popular education, the radio, is controlled by the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. Any Department of Education in its senses would insist upon having control of both these institutions and use one to supplement the other until every national school had its own branch of the County Library and regular book talks, planned in conjunction with the libraries, send listeners along to their local branches to ask for books they had heard about over the air.

Librarians To Blame!

Some of the blame, however, must be laid on the librarians themselves. Their altitude, it seems to me, is too professional. They think of the County Library as a miniature university library with a well balanced stock, neatly classified under decimal headings and a published annual report showing an increase of 100 p.c. in the reading of books on agriculture or metaphysics. When a popular book appears, a book that everyone for six months will be anxious to read, they will hesitate to buy more than one or two copies because to do so would be to decrease their paper stock of 15,834 separate and distinct volumes. That is where the commercial libraries are ousting the public libraries—and serve them right!

The commercial libraries, which have no professional standards, and only desire to encourage people to read in order to get their tuppences or threepences, do not hesitate to buy as many copies as they can afford without worrying whether or not it reduces their paper stock.

The letter I speak of might conceivably act as a warning to Irish librarians that they are not running university libraries before the commercial institutions have made their existence unnecessary and the local authorities recognise it. They might consider whether it is not advisable to classify less and propagandise more. They need more money, far more money. They might try to bully the Department of Education into installing school libraries. They might try to induce the County Councils and the Department of Local Government to let them pay the village postmistress, or tobacconist, ten or twenty pounds a year to display their books, not for an hour a week in the schoolhouse, but for fifty-six hours a week in the shop.

And while it is their duty to set a higher standard than the commercial libraries can afford, they might also recognise that the village collection is not the place for advanced works on Philosophy, Agriculture or the Theory of Education.

Sunday Independent, 23 May, 1943

Should We Abolish Irish History?

1943-06-06

One of the interesting features of the present General Election is the feeling reflected in many speeches that there is something wrong with our whole educational system. That, of course, is particularly obvious in connection with the teaching of Irish. Outside the ranks of the Fianna Fail Party there seems to be a majority opinion that it has gone too far.

But the discontent is not confined to the question of the language, and if the suggestion of the Lord Mayor of Dublin is accepted and a commission appointed to plan an educational system for the country—and a very sensible suggestion it is—I hope they will begin by asking themselves what we are educating for?

One of the things that stares an observer in the face is that, as a race, we seem to suffer from a perpetual ingrowing toenail. We are endlessly concerned with ourselves. That, no doubt, is largely conditioned by our geographical situation. We are still the last outpost of Europe, and ideas, if they reach us at all, only reach us when they are already out of date. Time and the aeroplane may do much to alter that. Religion, naturally, also throws us in a good deal on ourselves. But the normal, healthy effects of nature and religion do not by any means account for the way we are turned inwards by comparison with our next door neighbours.

Typical Englishman

Your typical Englishman is a natural extravert. His mind is turned outwards: he is interested in what he observes; he is practical, experimental and usually rather good at his job. Politically he is the placidest man in the world, and when things go hard with him he tries to make the best of them. It is to this extraversion that he owes his endurance—as also indeed, his frequent lack of spirituality and his imperviousness to ideas.

We go all in the other direction. To our introversion we owe our quick-wittedness, our brilliant improvisations—and, unfortunately, our sloppiness and lack of staying power. We live in our imaginations, and when life doesn't fit in with these we give in. The classical example of our introversion is, of course, Mr. de Valera's statement that when he wanted to know what the Irish people thought, "he looked into his own heart." In practice, this could only mean that the laws of evidence were suspended.

Where we do make the mistake is in assuming that these characteristics are somehow peculiarly national. They are, of course, nothing of the kind but the direct result of environment and education: of the direction a child's mind is given from the moment it is born, and it seems to me that in Ireland everything conspires to turn the mind away from the real world and into a fictitious world of wish-fulfilment. There are many causes of this: the lack of an aristocracy, the lack of traditional craftsmanship, of beautiful buildings and furniture, to draw the mind outwards.

The Principal Cause

But the principal cause of introversion in human beings and in races is, of course, a feeling of inferiority. All races who have suffered frequent defeat have it in a greater or lesser degree. We seem to have it in the greatest possible degree, and it is instilled into our children in the form of history.

I once asked an Englishman: "What does history mean to you?" and without a moment's hesitation he replied "Prestige."

If I were to ask the same question of an Irishman with a similar degree of straightforwardness he would be bound to reply, "Self-justification." That is the difference between

the successful and the unsuccessful, the conqueror and the conquered. The failure spends his life fighting his battles over again; the other's battles are won.

I have before me an Irish history used in our schools. It is a well-written, well-illustrated little book. From my point of view it has only one fault. It is the story of Ireland against the world.

The Irish raiders in Britain, and Gaul "returned home with their long boats full of plunder and captives." The Norsemen, however, who raided Ireland, were "very savage and cruel." and "destroyed houses and churches, and carried away everything of value they could find." After that comes the "invasion" of the Normans who "were not braver men than the Irish, but they had better weapons." There you see the apologia at work, and a child whose name is probably Fitzgerald already asked to identify himself with "the Irish" in a seven hundred year old conflict. And when we turn to the "great Irishmen" of the time we find someone called Murray O'Daly who "wrote many beautiful poems"; Donnchadh Mor O Dalaigh, "a poet who never will be surpassed." as the editor quotes with apparent credulity, and Tadhg Dáil O Huiginn, "one of the greatest Gaelic poets." And those names are seriously given to the child as though they were the names of Dante, Shakespeare and Milton.

Confident History

There, it seems to me, is the self-justification, the apologia of defeat and it is instilled into our children from the earliest years. How can a child be brought up to turn outward towards the sunlight, to have confidence in itself and in life, when from the moment it learns anything it is taught to apologise for its own existence.

If we cannot have strong, confident history which will tell a child the story of O'Connell, of the Land League and the Irish Parliamentary Party, and show him how they made a nation out of nothing, it would be better to have no history at all.

But no commission that undertakes to plan a system of education for Ireland should fail to concentrate on training hand and eye: on games, crafts, housework and science, to correct this fatal turning in of the mind that results in so much disillusionment, apathy and discontent.

Sunday independent, 6 June, 1943.

It Does Not Matter If People Rot in Slums, Die of Tuberculosis, If They Know Irish?

1943-06-13

Sometimes two isolated incidents occur in quick succession that throw a vivid light upon one another. One day last week I met a man who was revisiting Ireland. He is an observant man whose business takes him into many places and among different classes, so I asked what changes he had noticed since his previous visit. He made no delay about answering. "Only that there seems to be a strong reaction against the Irish language," he replied.

Next morning I picked up one of the daily newspapers and read a letter to the editor concerning the General Election. The writer complained that though both Labour and Fine Gael promised "improved conditions in municipal and civil legislation, less unemployment, etc.," neither of them had made any reference whatever "*to the most important aspect of our life as a nation—the propagation of the Irish language.*" I have italicised the final phrase; it surely deserves it. And surely if there is any justification for the views of a detached observer like the man I have quoted, it is to be found in the attitude expressed in this letter.

What Is Progress?

Read it again and ask yourself what can it possibly mean. Failures in "municipal and civil legislation" have left whole families living like rats, have produced under-nourished, sickly children; unemployment has driven scores on scores of thousands of men from farmhouses all over the country to seek a living in foreign shipyards and factories; but their fate, whatever it may be, is dismissed as trifling beside "the most important aspect of our life as a nation."

Unless "our life as a nation" means something entirely different from our life as a people, this can only mean that it does not matter if people rot in slums, die of tuberculosis, emigrate, so long as the Irish language is "propagated"—among whom? one feels inclined to ask.

Yet this is not an isolated voice. A few weeks ago we had Mr. de Valera telling us that if we had to choose between a qualified man with a knowledge of Irish and a more highly qualified man without it we were bound to choose the former; otherwise "you make no progress." Progress in what direction? If we bring this down from vague generalities and assume that our qualified men are both doctors, and that the more highly qualified doctor must give precedence to the man with a knowledge of Irish, then we arrive at the logical conclusion that the saving of a child's life is not progress. And if it is not, what in heaven's name is progress?

"Sour Creed"

The fact is that there is a reaction against the Irish language which should be directed only against what the French call a *mystique* of the Irish language. The Gaelic Revival was part of a tendency common to every country to preserve what was vital in its own tradition against the inroads of commercial internationalism. It was intended to give our people a pride in themselves, to make them enjoy their own songs and dances and pastimes and go on creating them. It gathered about it people of every creed and class, but in the past twenty years all that intelligent, practical human element which aimed at making life pleasanter, more vital and various has dropped out and we are now faced with a sour doctrinaire mysticism which rates human life at less than the prestige of appointing a Gaelic-speaking doctor.

And that sour creed destroys the language itself in the process. It takes no account of the forces opposed to it, yet it can no more affect the spread of wireless and television, the cinema and cheap literature than it can stop the tides or the sun. Within five years from

the time they leave school the generation of children so expensively educated through Irish will be swept off their feet by foreign wireless, films and books. What is there to prevent it? Radio Eireann and the Government Publications Department with its translations of Scott, Dickens and Wilkie Collins? Nobody even in these poor departments is foolish enough to believe he can compete with the cinemas and libraries.

What Might Be Done

Nor, of course, should we seek to fight them at all in the sense in which our Gaelic mystics would like to fight them. All we can do with them is all that any other country can do to add to them, colour them, modify them to suit ourselves. We could, if we wished, publish every year a dozen or so books in Irish which young men and women who have learned Irish at school would really wish to read; we could have a few films which they would want to discuss and which would tell the world what we were really like; we could give them a radio station which they would listen to and be proud of. We could do all these things in the morning, and the admixture of what was our own would help us to assimilate what comes to us from outside without being swept off our feet as these poor boys and girls are at their first contact with the real world. But we don't. It is the curse of the *mystique* that it hates anything practical, anything that is concerned with the ordinary needs of ordinary men and women; it must go on its crazy course until that "strong reaction against the Irish language" which our visitor observed succeeds in doing what hundreds of years of foreign domination had failed to do and gives the people a loathing of the Irish language.

Sunday Independent, 13 Jun, 1943

What Are We Doing To Win The Peace?

1943-07-04

During the General Election a great deal of capital was made out of our neutrality. Now, no one wants to decry the blessings of peace. Only a fool would do that.

But we have now had four years of peace; four years during which other peoples were having their homes and their businesses blasted away, while we still had the opportunity of building and extending ours, and we are entitled to ask just how much we have done.

In theory we should be four years ahead of our competitors, but in practice, even under the most favourable circumstances, it never works out like that. Undoubtedly in a country at war an enormous amount of capital is wasted, buildings are destroyed, plants thrown out of gear: but against that must be set something else which should never be forgotten—that is the removal of the restrictive effect of capital.

That restrictive effect of capital—that is the normal way in which invention is slowed down by the practical difficulties of financing more than a small fraction of the improvements which can be effected (what Shaw in “The Apple Cart” personifies as Breakages, Ltd.)—almost disappears in the vital necessities of war. The replacement of ships by aeroplanes for regular transatlantic travel, a development which under normal circumstances might have taken ten years, is effected in as many days. The regular use of dehydrated food (that is food that has been deprived of a great deal of its bulk and weight by the removal of its water content) became necessary when shipping space became precious. And all these developments contain a threat to old established economic methods. We still cannot guess what effect dehydration will have on our exports of dairy produce. But the most astonishing of these developments is in the use of plastics. This is something which will effect the livelihood of many and the life of all. Even the false teeth we wear will presently be replaced by complete sets in a plastic material, light, cheap and unbreakable.

We are told that we shall live in houses where no heating will be necessary, because, owing to the insulating quality of the material, our own body heat will be more than sufficient. We are, of course, only told as much as is good for us: but enough for anyone to see that twenty-five years of go-as-you-please business methods have been fully made up for, in five years of intense scientific activity. At the end of the war, this flood will be loosed on the world, destroying as many industries as it creates. How are we preparing to meet it? Shall we, when the war ends, be five years ahead of our competitors or fifty years behind?

Thousands of others must have groaned as I did on realising that the new Dáil, which will have to make the economic adjustments necessitated by the enormous technical advances in the belligerent countries, is, judging by some of the speeches made on the opening day, going to permit its time to be frittered away by men who seem to have become paralysed in the operatic attitudes of twenty-five years ago. Our unemployed men and women cannot be fed on opera solos. They must find work. The work cannot be created overnight, but it can be created by the organised development of agriculture, industry and scientific research over a number of years. With a sensible plan before them people will work. They will make sacrifices. At the end of each year they will check progress. When the plan shows results they will work harder, because it will give them some hope for the future of themselves and their children.

Sunday Independent, 4 July, 1943

Culture In Mud Cabins And Four-Hand Reels

1943-07-11

“Whenever I hear the word culture I reach for my gun.” are words credited to an eminent European publicist. If for ‘culture’ we substitute “Irish culture” or “native culture” or “cultural heritage,” as these are now used, I, for one, would clasp the hand of the publicist with emotion.

The words “Irish culture” make me want to reach for some weapon which—unlike stone age axes and pikes—is not associated with Ireland at all—a four-thousand pound blockbuster, for preference. “Irish culture” has been on the rampage again during the past week in a survey of rural cottages begun in Co. Dublin by the students of the National University, under the auspices of The Folklore Commission, the Royal Irish Academy, and the National Museum. One morning paper informed us that this survey would act “as a stimulus to public interest in our cultural heritage.” At which, in the absence of a bomb and a suitable machine to drop it from, I reached for my pen.

Of course, there is nothing wrong in voting men and women drawing cottages if they want to draw cottages. There are plenty of them, and, even in the details of thatching, a person can see there are interesting facts to be elicited. But Irish cabins are not a “cultural heritage.”

They do not even form the basis of any possible form of cultural education, and to suggest that to do so is to belie the most obvious fact in history, which is that our grandfathers’ principal ambition was to get out of them.

Our “cultural” enthusiasts are so determined on proving that culture comes from the cabins that they are even prepared to blind themselves to the fact that the cabins represent life artificially forced down to its most rudimentary level. What a really cultured man like Davitt, who had to acquire his culture at the expense of a great deal of hard work and self-sacrifice, would have thought of such a view does not occur to them.

Some Simple Facts

Here are a few simple facts about our real cultural heritage.

The Government Stationery Office, until paper became short, annually published a considerable number of books in Gaelic: books like “She”; “The Moonstone”; “At The Villa Rose” and “The War of the Worlds”; not to mention many silly books which from any point of view should never have been published at all.

But if any young man or woman wanted readable lives of the great figures of the past hundred years, he would search the list in vain.

For any information or inspiration about his own country he would have had to turn to the catalogues of English publishers, and very meagre and very uninspiring would be most of what he found there. He would find an excellent life of O’Connell but none of Davis, none of Fintan Lalor. He would find nothing about the Fenian Movement; nothing about the extraordinary and gripping story of the Invincible Conspiracy. He would find readable lives of Parnell, but none of Joe Biggar: above all, none of Davitt.

As for the period from 1916 on, about which our politicians are forever fulminating, he would find moderately good lives of Collins, but none whatever of Griffith or O’Higgins, perhaps the most remarkable statesmen this country has produced.

The story of the great Churchmen of the period has been far more neglected; and as for the Arts....

Surely it should not be necessary to remind such presumably educated bodies as the Royal Irish Academy that there is no available book on Georgian architecture, one of our greatest cultural treasures, and while there is a book on the castles, there is none on our

abbeys and churches: that, from the point of view of the average educated visitor who wants to know what he can see, we have nothing to show.

The State finances and members of the Government attend lectures on sixth century Welsh poetry, but there is no encouragement for the young student to devote his time to the study of Mangan and Allingham. They do not represent cabin culture.

There is no particular shame about the poverty of our cultural life, so long as we recognise that it is impoverished, and endeavour to persuade the Government to divert some of the thousands they spend on the publication of trashy English fiction and the study of sixth century Welsh poetry, to subsidise cultural research of real national importance. But it is intellectual bankruptcy to pretend that our culture is not in our great men and our great buildings but in mud cabins and four-hand reels.

Sunday Independent, 11 July, 1943

Our Irish Town have Their Attractions

1943-07-18

Some day somebody will write about cycling in Ireland as Stevenson wrote about travelling with a donkey in the Cevennes, and then everybody will discover it to be the ideal holiday. By cycling, if course, I do not mean going off in shorts on a racing bicycle and covering a hundred miles a day. That is splendid; it is heroic; it as good a method as any I know of covering great distances to no conceivable purpose, but it has nothing to do with cycling.

Cycling is really the nearest modern equivalent to the easy-going tempo of eighteenth century travel when you set out in your carriage to go to Dublin and halted every few miles to view "the amenities" of the neighbouring estates. It is a way of seeing things; the setting out in the morning in the long shadows, meal by the roadside, the drink in the pub.

It is a leisurely, sociable, old-fashioned, gossipy method of travel that keeps you all the time in immediate physical contact with the landscape and the people, and Ireland is one of the few countries where you can still do it in comfort.

Admittedly, it has its drawbacks. The climate is uncertain, though, unless it is absolutely perverse, and blows and pours all day, it need not seriously hinder a man from putting in his thirty or so miles. Hotels are dear and occasionally bad as well, and some day, no doubt, the Irish Tourist Association will arrange an exhibition of all the old prints they have removed from the walls, "Coming of Age in the Olden Time," "The Drunkard's Progress," "The Drowned Child of the Aran Fisherman," and "Sicilian Lady Captured by Corsican Bandits." I, for one, will be sorry, but when one has suffered much from things like that, one reaches the point of liking them.

Hotels are inevitable at night, for many of us do not find that camping has any eighteenth century favour whatever, but if necessary they can be dispensed with by day. A dull meal that costs anything up to five shillings is sufficient to put a cyclist into a state of exasperation on which all the beauties of Nature are lost, so borrow or steal a thermos flask—if you can find one in wartime—or you may like to bring a tin kettle, have it boiled in a friendly farmhouse and have your lunch by the road.

Guide books are few and badly written, which is all the more reason for making frequent halts and enquiries. Nobody has really seen Celbridge who hasn't caught a glimpse of the house where Swift dashed Vanessa's letter to Stella before her, or the mansion which Speaker Connolly of the Irish Parliament designed for himself with the aid, of "the gentlemen of the county."

At Clonmel there is the Grammar School that young George Borrow attended and which he so wonderfully described in "Lavengro." and at Cahir the castle which Essex captured on his way to lose his head, and at Carrick a splendid manorhouse where (in spite of the guide books) Anne Boleyn was not born.

Irish towns have suffered and submitted to the reputation for dullness they acquired in the nineteenth century when any town was considered dull unless it had a row of fourteenth century cottages, and too often the architects of the period tried to improve them by erecting Romanesque and Gothic monstrosities in the shape of churches. These are really the only blot on the landscape, and if you have an eye for beautiful bridges and houses, eighteenth century churches, and, above all, those charming little Tholsels, or market houses, which you can find in many places, you will find that, however the locals may grouse, many of our Irish towns are dignified and beautiful.

Nor need anyone confine his holiday to the west coast. That more than any other part of Ireland depends on the weather, and for sheer beauty, it is hard to beat parts of Kilkenny and Tipperary.

And here, another word of advice. In cycling never go against the grain of a county. These run along the river valleys, and from the earliest times it is along these valleys that traffic has passed and civilisation established itself. Nearly everything that is worth seeing

in Tipperary lies within a few miles of the Suir; sleepy Holy Cross with its great abbey, its millpond and trees and weir; Athassel, Cashel, Cahir, Clonmel and Carrick.

The Barrow runs through Athy, Carlow, Leighlinbridge, Bagenalstown, Borris, Gralgnamanagh and New Ross, and there are no lovelier tracts of country and no handsomer buildings anywhere in Ireland.

Rather wilder, though every bit as interesting, is the run along the Shannon through Athlone, Clonmacnoise, Shannonbridge, Portumna and Killaloe.

And remember that wherever you go, the best thing cycling can give you is a sense of the country and the people. You will not catch it with a camera; it is a matter of light and air and movement and colour; of sitting on a wall and absorbing the landscape through every pore. The true cyclist is his own camera and his profoundest pleasure is when some picture swims up before his mind of red cattle sheltering under the dark tent of a sycamore before the blue flank of Slievenamon, or of a Connemara landscape after a shower the chalky glow flashes along the road, the cows, black and red, stand out with such extraordinary vividness, and the mountains with their flashing streams begin to emerge from behind the great curtains of rain.

Sunday Independent, 18 July, 1944

This Talk About Education

1943-07-25

For my own information I jotted down a list of the things which delegates at the Trades Union Congress in Cork considered desirable in the way of educational reform. Here they are: (1) All agencies of education to be open and free for all. (2) Extension of the school leaving age to 18. (3) Courses in Civics. (4) Medical and dental examination of children. (5) A Christian spirit. (6) "Emotional" education, (7) "Respect for things pure and lovely, a reverence for the things of the spirit and a passion for truth, justice, culture, and Irish tradition."

I then took a walk through some of the poorer areas of Dublin, and I saw the same sights as I have always seen: thousands of poor families sitting on doorsteps or leaning out of windows, ragged, barefoot, dirty, and came home and jotted down my own list of essential things in the way of educational reform as they came to me and more or less in the order of their importance. (1) Water, preferably mixed with soap. (2) Houses, playgrounds, libraries. (3) Clothes and boots. (4) Medical and dental examination. (5) Courses in carpentry and other crafts for boys. (6) Courses in cookery and domestic work for girls. (7) Respect for money and hard work; a reverence for the home and a passion for thrift, honesty and sobriety.

Facing Realities

Dear reader, you pay your money and take your choice. On one thing only do myself and the delegates to the Trades Union Congress agree, and that is the only item in their programme which seems, to have been suggested by the realities of the situation. Not that I question the wisdom of the Congress in declaring "that all the agencies of education, primary, secondary, vocational and university, should be open and free to all," or that "secondary education is a monopoly of the well-to-do." On the contrary, I am so enthusiastically in agreement, that I am perturbed by the notion which has lodged at the back of my mind that classes in trades are a monopoly of the Irish Trades Unions and that they refuse to allow the children of the poor to study such subjects in the Technical Schools. I cannot remember where or how I acquired this idea: I sincerely hope it is wrong, because if it happened to be true it would brand the delegates who passed the resolution dealing with the freedom of education as humbugs of the worst kind. I do not question the value of secondary education, the extension of the school-leaving age, civics or "emotional" education, whatever that may be. I merely ask whether we are making proper use of the facilities for primary education which we already possess. I shall be more convinced of the necessity for keeping those ragged, dirty boys and girls I see about the streets in school to the age of eighteen when I am satisfied that it is worth while sending them to school at all.

The Real Problem

What are we going to do with these boys and girls? That is the real problem of education in Ireland. There are two courses open to us. One is to let them fend for themselves, and that, more or less, is what we have always done and are still doing. But if that is our intention, we are wasting enormous sums of money on merely keeping them alive and allowing their maintenance and education to become a burden on the industrious and intelligent minority. The other is to establish them on a decent level of existence where they will be neither a burden nor a scandal, and that, more or less, is what we are supposed to be doing. But in fact we have never made up our mind which we want, and we laugh and blather our way through the, dilemma.

If we are sincere about education, we must realise that it is based on social conditions. It is not enough to say in our amiable, half-hearted fashion that people must be taken out of the slums and given reasonable conditions of existence. We must do it, and do it from two sides. We must not only give the parents the advantages which we say they should have, but we must be prepared to compel them to pass the advantages on to their children.

While we still continue to crowd human beings in scores into insanitary slums, we have no right to expect teachers to make a success of any system of education whatever, but unless we are prepared to follow up every improvement in social conditions to the limit, by prosecuting parents who refuse to take advantage of them and continue to send their children to school dirty, verminous, ragged or underfed, we shall simply have invented a new and considerably larger channel through which the earnings of the intelligent and industrious can, be conveniently poured off with profit to nobody.

Sunday Independent, 25 July, 1943

Education Systems That Provoke Quarrels

1943-08-01

At the Trade Union Congress, the congress of vocational teachers and elsewhere, there has been a considerable amount of indignation expressed against the discrimination, practised in Government or semi-Government institutions against the students of vocational schools. The latest example is that of the Central Bank, which has confined its junior male clerkships to secondary school students who have passed the Leaving Certificate examination with honours. That automatically rules out boys from the vocational schools.

“This policy,” says the General Secretary of the Vocational Education Officers’ Organisation, “is calculated to rob the public services of some of the best talent available and sets a high premium upon social snobbery.” Delegates at the Trades Union Congress were even more outspoken and suggested that the secondary schools were being used as a class weapon against the workers. Now, this is not an isolated grievance nor a new one, and I can only join with the vocational teachers in hoping that the economics of Mr. de Valera’s new bank will not be as old-fashioned as its outlook on education. But at the same time I would ask teachers and others to consider the implications of their protests.

Three Systems

The view of the Trades Union Congress is that secondary education should be thrown open to all. But is that a solution? We have in this country three different systems of education, three systems of management, and three sets of teachers whose work is so highly specialised that each requires different training and qualifications.

Elementary education is more or less the same for everybody. Then we are supposed to be divided into those who require a literary education to fit them for the university, and a majority who are to be trained for agriculture or industry, the first go to the secondary schools, the others to the Vocational Schools. In practice, say the delegates of the Trades Union Congress (with, I must admit a certain amount of truth), the well-to-do go to the secondary schools, the poor to the vocational schools.

From my own experience I should say that brilliant boys are generally captured for the secondary schools, but that is rarely so much in their own interest as in the interest of the school under our precious system of examination results.

That system produces competition among the secondary schools, and now there is this other quarrel between the secondary schools and the vocational schools. Readers who live in country towns will probably be able to satisfy themselves that whenever a vacancy for a junior clerkship in the County Council occurs there is fierce competition between the two, and in neither case is it the teachers’ fault. If a boy from the vocational school gets the job, the secondary school loses pupils and vice versa.

Government Joins In

Now the Government has joined in this thoroughly unhealthy competition and thrown in its weight against the boys and girls from the vocational schools. The Labour Party has thrown itself in on the other side with a cry of “class distinction.”

But what neither the Government nor the Labour Party seems to have considered for a moment is that here we have two highly specialised systems of education both of which seem to have for their main function, the production of junior clerks for offices and banks, and that they leave us no conclusion but that one or other of those systems, of education is superfluous and that both are probably rotten.

That, if you like, is strong language, but it is at least relevant. The proposal that secondary education should be made free for all is not relevant. I doubt if anyone could

study the statements that have been made without coming to the conclusion that there is simply no place in this country for two competitive systems of education. There is nothing in our national life which corresponds to it. The number of boys and girls who can go on to a university is obviously limited. Equally, the number who can go in for the Old-fashioned trades is not only limited, but is decreasing daily. The old trade or technical school is a relic of days before the advent of the machine, and the more specialised science, industry and agriculture become, the more necessary it is for our educational system to be general, basic and adaptable.

“White-Collars”

There is no reason in the world why, instead of three separate systems of education, we should not have one which would take charge of the child from the age of five until it delivered him at the farm, the university or the workshop, properly equipped to make the best of any of them. Instead of that, we have allowed our secondary and vocational schools to be turned into glorified commercial colleges for the production of more and more white-collar workers, unfitted by their education for turning their hand to anything else.

Sunday Independent, 1 August, 1943

A Grilled Steak Can Overrule Prejudices

1943-08-08

The streets of Dublin this summer have presented a curious spectacle for people who think. They have been filled by two waves of people, one appearing from the direction of Amiens St. Station and the other from Westland Row.

The first and more obvious section, recognisable even in the dark by their scimitar accents, represents the visitors from the North of Ireland, many of whom up to a year or two ago would not have been seen dead on O'Connell Street, but have now been lured here by a pleasant odour of cooking wafted across the Border. The Border is a principle, but a grilled steak is a fact. The second group are the holidaymakers from that vast army of Irishmen and women who have gone to seek employment in Great Britain. Here, too, political prejudices have had to be overcome, and many a stout "patriot" who believed that crooning and rugby and cricket and hockey imperilled the national soul has ventured timorously forth into the very homeland of these "abominations." Whether either party has returned home with all its prejudices intact is doubtful.

In Scarva And Portadown

One Senator has "warned" us that our exiles may return with dangerous ideas, and, no doubt other profound intellects in Scarva and Portadown, are disturbed by the thought of the notions which innocent Belfastmen may have assimilated with their grilled steaks.

But if this drift of populations in search of holidays and food and work has done nothing else it has shown us how much we allow ourselves to be divided and ruled by faction, and what very little significance faction has in face of the simplest material reality.

When prejudice can be overruled by a grilled steak, it is time to take it out and give it a dusting.

Faction, which I take to mean attaching to a mere difference of opinion a greater importance than it deserves, has always been the curse of Ireland. It was so in Swift's day, and he saw clearly how it paralysed all positive ameliorative action by insisting on the rules that divide and ignoring all the common interests that unite a people. Old John O'Leary lamented bitterly "the unscrupulousness of Irishmen when they have brains, and their factiousness when they have any principle." Last week we had the unholy pother created by some people because a handful of soldiers in Galway sang English songs. At the same time we read that the British troops in Tunisia liked to march to a German marching song picked up over the wireless, but nobody suggested that English culture was endangered.

In U.C.D.

On another plane we have the reply to a Committee of Professors in the National University who reported that compulsory Irish there would be harmful to the university and to Irish. According to this reply nothing can be achieved in this direction except by compulsion-How sterile all this skirmishing is! To insist on anything up to a point where it can only create further dissension is as factious as a Twelfth of July oration.

The whole of Irish life is vitiated by this intolerance. "Cynical" is the word used by the Committee of Professors to describe the attitude of the students to Irish, but why confine it to Irish? Why confine it to Southern Ireland? It has nothing in particular to do with either, but is generated by this sodden atmosphere of disunion and dissension which makes all positive action appear futile and Quixotic.

Every positive force in the country has been split into two or three or thirty sections. The Radio people have an auditory sense so fine that they can sniff national heresy from a tune. It seems impossible to start any social movement without one faction or another

attempting to obtain control of it, and even the Border itself is maintained, not as we like to pretend by force majeure, but by our own refusal to make statements with a proper regard for the feelings of those who live beyond the Border. No wonder the students are cynical. It would be a miracle if they were anything else.

The Swift Way

In these days it may be well to remember how Swift succeeded in overcoming prejudices, which were infinitely more angry then than they are now. First in his campaign for the use of Irish manufacture; then in his attack on Wood's coinage, he chose causes which cut clean across the lines of both warring factions and reminded them of the things they had in common.

Or consider how the Gaelic League in its youth united young Irishmen everywhere, North and South. "If we remember right," says Professor Corkery "a branch of the Gaelic League in Cork that desired to call itself the Robert Emmet branch, was not allowed by headquarters to do so." Professor Corkery tells this as a very good joke, but the joke, I suspect, is on the Professor. Few Irishmen of our own day will dispute the wisdom of Gaelic League Headquarters in reminding the Bold Robert Emmets of Cork that there are more dignified ways of honouring great Irishmen than by using them as sticks with which to beat other Irishmen.

Sunday Independent, 8 August, 1943

People Cannot Do Without A Purpose In Their Lives

1943-08-15

An English contemporary has just appeared with a highly original and entertaining scheme for the abolition of poverty and unemployment. Since the beginning of the war there has been practically no unemployment in Great Britain or, indeed, in any of the belligerent countries. On the contrary, there has been such a shortage of man power that they have been importing labour from more fortunate countries which still enjoy the benefits of peace and plenty, and, stranger still, the inhabitants of these happy countries display almost indecent relief at the chance of sharing the risks and privations of their neighbours. They are prepared to do without whiskey, without butter, without more than a fraction of the meat and sugar they could have at home.

Nobody can deny that Great Britain is a happier country since millions of boys and girls have ceased to rot at street corners, even if the rest of the population has had to go short of luxuries, nor, I think, can it be questioned that many of our fellow countrymen who go there do so less for the high wages than for the chance of feeling themselves once more productive, responsible, independent men and women. Why then, asks our contemporary, end such an ideal state of affairs and plunge millions of the population back into idleness and hopelessness? Why not just stay permanently at war?

What Might Be Done

I need scarcely say the proposal is in the highest degree ironic, but it states the problem admirably. Nothing but the immediacy of war ever forces a government to take complete control of the destinies of a country, and from the moment they do take control there are never hands enough to keep the machines working.

Almost every government looks upon arms as a necessity and the welfare of its citizens as a luxury.

Workers may go in rags and live in lice-infested slums, but armies must be properly housed and clothed and fed. Suppose, for a change, we were to declare war on poverty, and that the genius, the labour, the material that go to the production of new types of aircraft were to be applied to the houses that are so urgently needed. Instead of being fobbed off with an annual sop which shifted a few thousand families into good homes while new tenements were set up elsewhere, can anyone doubt that within five or ten years we could have good homes for all?

A Cut-Throat System

There is no mystery about the cause and cure of unemployment. From the moment a country is organised for war it becomes plain that it is the result of a lack of balance between production and distribution, which means, in fact, that more money is to be made by distribution than by manufacture.

In the modern world whatever you buy—a loaf of bread, a book, an insurance policy—you may be certain that the actual cost of production is the smallest item in the price you pay for it. The rest is distribution charges.

When you pay an insurance premium, at least a third, and possibly a half, goes to the agent; another third to the company. It is useless to blame the agent, who has to pay the heavy initial charge for his agency; it is useless to blame the company, who have to face competition from other companies. The fault is in the lack of control, which allows

thousands of men and women who could be employed in the production of necessities to be diverted into a cut-throat system of distribution.

In time, of course, the process means that there will be nothing to distribute, as more and more energy goes to the distribution of less and less. The goitre will have grown bigger than the head. And yet, when we examined the protest of the vocational school teachers, we discovered that two systems of education were both principally employed in the production of Junior clerks for offices and banks. Every system for dealing with unemployment, from the Mount Street Club to a great State, is fundamentally an attempt to keep distribution within its proper limits and restore the primacy of the producer, whether he be farmer or factory hand. Whenever economic conditions become acute, people fall back on barter, which is the same thing. The problem is how to make half a day's work in the fields pay for a suit, of clothes.

Unfortunately, instead of facing up to the implications of this, modern nations tend to break up into conflicting ideologies, which have nothing to do with unemployment and, in fact, reduce it to a minor role. Property becomes in the mouths of one school the sacred rights of the individual: to the other school the individual has no rights at all, and the State, whose only purpose should be to hold the balance evenly between production and distribution, extends its claims in order to interfere in every function of a man's life.

But the war should have taught us one thing. No Irish Government need be afraid to declare war on poverty. People, can do without whiskey, butter, meat and sugar. They cannot do without a purpose in their lives. They only ask to be used, provided only they can leave their children a better world to live in.

Sunday Independent, 15 August, 1943

A Book Industry That Is Greatly Neglected

1943-08-22

The book I have just been reading was very very interesting, so interesting in fact, that it almost made me forget I had an article to write. It was a book by an Irish writer, published in London. It cost me 10s. 6d. It wasn't what anyone could call an outstanding event; it had its couple of week of popularity, and probably sold about two thousand copies, which will not make anybody's fortune. But as I laid it aside I did a little sum.

Two thousand copies at 10s. 6d means a thousand pounds and a little over, and if half the edition was sold in Ireland, we may assume that a little over a hundred pound of that money reached the Irish booksellers; if the author lives in Ireland that means another hundred. Where has the rest gone? English paper makers have had their share; English printers and binders have had theirs; advertisements in English papers account for something; the rest has gone to the English publisher.

I am sorry if I cannot help worrying about that odd eight hundred pounds. There are so many of these half guineas, so many eight and sixpences and half crowns and even modest tenpence halfpennies, all representing employment for journalists, printers, paper makers, book binders and packers, and all of them passing over the heads of unemployed Irish men and women, stretching out their hands for a share.

Urgently Needed

Of course, we have good, old-established Irish publishing houses, but if we ask ourselves why this book was not published by one of them we shall find that they confine themselves to books of local interest.

This was a book of much more than local interest, which would probably sell as much or more abroad than it did at home, and the author naturally took it to a publisher who was in a position to sell it abroad. There is no such publisher in Ireland. Finland has two great publishing houses, both of them doing considerable business with the American market, though they are cut off from it by the language difficulty, and every book which the Finnish publishers can produce has to be translated into English.

We, on the contrary, have direct contact with the great English-speaking market and could compete there on equal terms.

Obviously there are certain types of books which it would not pay us to produce; all sorts of scientific and scholarly works which we have neither the authors to produce nor the public to read. But the sort of popular books which you can see by the hundred in any bookseller's? Even confining ourselves for subjects to our own country, I have just listed some dozen books which are urgently needed, and which, if they were written in a popular style, would be as saleable, abroad as at home.

Three Famous Men

For instance, as the anniversary arises,. I understand that there is no life of Michael Collins in print. There are no lives of Arthur Griffith or Kevin O'Higgins in or out of it. Yet there is no shortage of Irish writers. It is simply that there is no Irish publisher producing for the general English-speaking market who is sufficiently interested to commission such books. If there were he could find half-a-dozen men in Dublin alone any of whom would write admirable lives of either Griffith or O'Higgins, even if they were merely assured of a reasonable return for their work.

I went into a Dublin bookshop the other day and looked through H. V. Morton's "In Search of Ireland," and an anthology of Irish Short Stories. Each of these had already sold

many thousands of copies; so many hundreds of pounds of which only a fraction, remained in Ireland. Does anyone imagine they could not as well have been produced here?

Country's Life Blood

I commend this thought both to those who argue for the censorship of literature and those who argue against it. We in Ireland have a tendency to become violently intolerant about matters of principle, principally because we forget that any other interests exist. We seem to be incapable of learning the lesson which Swift preached over two hundred years ago—that our country's life blood is its manufactures.

When he gave his housekeeper a guinea to buy something of Irish manufacture for herself, she returned with a set of his own works, printed and bound in Ireland. If anyone to-day were to go out and purchase a set of Swift's works in any form whatever, he would come back with nice examples of English manufacture, and have made another little contribution to the drift of industry and brains from our shores.

Sunday Independent, 22 August, 1943

Should Make Us Sit Up

1943-08-29

The forthcoming appointment of a Director of the British Broadcasting Corporation has created a ferment in English public opinion regarding the future of that famous institution.

In its the early days the B.B.C., holds the same sort of indeterminate position as our own E.S.B. between a Government department and a public company, used to be held up as a model British compromise between the devil of State control and the deep sea of private enterprise. In recent years the compromise has begun lose its charm. In practice the B.B.C. has tended to acquire many of the vices of the civil service without acquiring any of the corresponding virtues of business firms.

To our astonishment we now find responsible English critics (and in socialist papers, too!) admitting that British broadcasting is far inferior to American. Stranger still (for we must remember that capitalism is invariably accused of hoodwinking the public) we are told that the standard of news commentary is far higher and more responsible in America than in England; and that while the British public is doped with promises of a better world, in the sweet by-and-by, the American is served by the keenest and most critical brains in journalism and literature. And lastly, the American programmes are better value both as entertainment and as education.

Goose And Gander

That should make us sit up. Apart from the malicious pleasure one derives in these hard days when State control is all the rage from hearing the ranks of Tuscany burst into loud applause of private enterprise, we should realise that if these things are sauce for the British goose, they are cod liver oil for the Irish gander.

The BBC only tends to develop a Civil Service mentality, but our broadcasting service has never had any other. If the B.B.C., in the words of Professor Joad, who ought to know, “sits on the fence and gives gentle taps on both sides of the question,” Radio Eireann has made itself a neat little air raid shelter within the fence, and refuses to admit that there is any question at all.

British broadcasters may hint delicately at rashers and eggs for all in the sweet by-and-by, but ours, in order to avoid embarrassing the government, may not even hint that there could be anything to expect by-and-by: everything being in order at the moment.

“The War At Sea”

If it is worth Great Britain’s while to give private enterprise a chance in the world of broadcasting, it should, one imagines, be essential for us. Admittedly, it is hard at first to imagine what a national radio run by a public company would be like. Instead, let us imagine for a moment what a newspaper would be like if run by Radio Eireann.

Pride of place would be given to the latest departmental regulation about pigs (if there are any pigs!), and then would come a headline, “The War at Sea.”

All controversial articles (including the present one) would, of course, be barred. Instead you would have articles on Bicycle Repairing, Bridge and Budapest—I quote from recent programmes. There would be no letters to the Editor, first, because there would be nothing to write to the Editor about, and secondly, because there would be no Editor, merely another Civil Servant.

As a professional job of work, in a competitive world, Radio Eireann would find things difficult. It suggests that whatever form State control may take, it should never have anything to do with the direction of public opinion. At the same time it helps us to judge what a broadcasting station might do for us. It might give us news interpreted in such a way

as to be intelligible to everyone. It might bring living ideas into our lives and help to keep us in touch with the rest of the world. It might enable us to keep abreast, of contemporary literature, drama and music, and present us to the world in a form that the world might possibly appreciate.

Sunday Independent, 29 August, 1943

Our Exiles May Influence Our Future

1943-09-05

The supreme test of a Government is not how it meets a wartime emergency, but how it handles the awkward transition from war-time to peace-time. Of many a wartime Government it could be said, as it was said of one Irish politician, that he was like the cow that gave good milk and then kicked over the bucket. The reason for that is simple.

In an emergency every Government acquires wide powers and develops what may be described as an emergency mentality. As it is so much easier to govern by decree than by agreement, it goes on imagining emergencies where there is none, clinging to every vestige of power, and compelling its citizens to fight for the return of each of their free institutions in turn. Sometimes they get them all back: generally, each war period sees further powers transferred to the Government; and many of the conditions which made the present war possible were produced immediately after the last by the weariness and indifference of the community.

The People's Liberties

We had a similar struggle in our own country immediately after the signing of the Treaty when some of our war-minded politicians urged that it was not the business of the people to decide their own destiny. All parties now agree that this was ill-judged; but that the people were not stamped out of their rights we owe to the liveliness of our popular institutions, particularly the Press. People may have forgotten what it suffered in those days, when some Irish journalists went in peril of their lives; but their tenacity won the day, and popular liberties triumphed.

It would be too much to hope that at the end of this war we shall not have a minor recrudescence of the same disease. Almost certainly it will be exacerbated by the return of thousands of Irish men and women from employment abroad. Some years of regular work, of high pay and good living conditions will have made them critical of native standards. Fifty thousand votes—to take a rough figure—may imperil any Government, so already some of our politicians have taken alarm, and there has been loose, talk of “ideas dangerous to the State.” I say this sort of talk is loose because it can lead only to an attempt to create another “emergency” after the real emergency has passed and to retain powers to which no peacetime Government should ever lay claim.

The Real Danger

The real danger in the return of our emigrants is not in the ideas they may bring back, but in the use which a Government greedy of power may make of them to create a bogey man.

Anybody can govern with the “aid” of hand-picked institutions, but it requires political sense to govern by reconciling conflicting interests. That is what we have yet to learn, and we should do well to model ourselves less on countries where the conflict of interests has been suppressed rather than reconciled, and more upon the small northern nations like our own who really have reconciled, for instance, Monarchy and freedom; private property and a high standard of living.

Because our history makes us turn our eyes for military assistance towards the Latin countries, which are akin to us in religion, we still tend to draw on them, unwisely for our political ideas, forgetting that their natural tendency to absolutism is entirely foreign to our own sturdy temperament which would be the first to kick against it.

A famous Australian novelist has described how any settlement in her own country was instantly set in a ferment by the arrival of one of two Irishmen, with their keen sense of

social justice. Nature and history have made us that way: and we shall be a far happier country when we recognise it and allow ourselves to be guided by it.

Sunday Independent, 5 September, 1943

The People Are Fallible, But They Must Be Trusted

1943-09-12

Following the strongly adverse comment it has caused throughout the country, the new Seanad met last week and elected a new chairman. Mr. de Valera, faced with a motion (by Mr. McGilligan and Dr. O'Higgins) disapproving the method of its election, can scarcely feel so light-hearted. The Seanad is his own particular creation, and its failure is the first big crack in the facade of his Constitution. So far one can see, there are three courses open to him: he may simply brazen it out; he may, without having recourse to an amendment of the Constitution, revise the system of election; or he may decide to reconstitute the Seanad entirely and submit his proposals to a Referendum.

The first, of course, he may adopt, though, it would require considerable audacity and would, anyway, be unwise. Though as a people we may be cynical, no politician would trust us to connive at a system of election which can scarcely be carried on without bribery. That would imply bringing government itself into contempt.

As to the second course, some of the proposals which have been made ignore what the Constitution permits and what it does not permit. To begin, it permits a quite drastic revision of the method of election without any recourse to a Referendum. It prescribes the election of Senators from five panels of candidates representing Culture, Agriculture, Labour, Industry and Public Administration. It does not stipulate that there shall be two sets of panels as at present, one nominated by the representative institutions and the other by Dáil members, giving numerical superiority to the latter, nor provide for the crazy system of election by a combination of Dáil Deputies and Borough and County Councillors.

The simplest, and probably the most sensible, course for Mr. de Valera, if only he could trust to the judgment of anybody beside himself, would be to continue the present system of nomination in so far as it applies to institutions, and throw the voting open to the whole Dáil electorate. That, at least, would probably give us a reasonably non-party Seanad and remove the ground for charges of bribery. Fundamentally, the idea of the Nominating Bodies is sound; it is the only sound thing in the whole scheme: but Mr. de Valera is obsessed by the idea of the fallibility of everybody except himself, and what he gave with one hand he took away with the other by establishing the party-system Dáil on an equal footing with the Nominating Bodies. It is the same weakness which made him, in drafting the Constitution, concede the three fundamental liberties of the Press, of assembly and of association, and then proceed to qualify them until they were worthless. The Press and the people are fallible; only Mr. de Valera is always right.

It was the same craze for infallibility which made him reserve the power to nominate eleven of the sixty senators, and this, being part of the Constitution must remain until it is abolished by Referendum.

That is one reason why no possible reconstruction of the Seanad within the existing Constitution can ever be anything but patchwork.

It is undemocratic that any party leader should have the right to nominate to the Legislature over the heads of the people. The same heads may be thick, but they are not thick enough to mistake authoritarianism for democracy.

But, above all, no Second or Upper House is worth a straw unless it is given some real power. Under the Constitution it has only the power of delaying a piece of legislation, and even then, in the usual "tails I'm right, heads you're wrong" method of the Taoiseach, that shadow of power is itself so restricted as to be, like the various other powers conceded by the Constitution, valueless.

In this country, apart from the Church, which does not meddle with politics, we have no stable, traditional ruling class corresponding to the Lords Temporal and Spiritual of Great

Britain, and the only group which could possibly take its place is that first envisaged by Mr. de Valera: the specialised intelligence of the country working through its own organisations.

Admittedly, there are difficulties about this as about any other scheme, but the framework is already there in the five groups set out in the Constitution, and it should not be beyond the scope of human intelligence to devise separate electorates for each of the five panels. It might give us a Seanad free of the curse of party politics; but to be a Seanad in anything more than name, it must have some real power. Mr. de Valera must learn the first principle of constitutional government and give up his attempts to control every organ of public opinion, from the daily newspaper to the Seanad. The people are fallible, but they must be trusted.

Sunday Independent, 12 September, 1943

Only Sort of Government That Counts

1943-09-19

The Conference of Municipal Authorities at Wexford left us no doubt of the feeling of public representatives about the Managerial Act. It has usurped the place in their affections formerly held by the Local Appointments Commission, carrying as it does the centralising tendency in Local Government a stage further.

The next logical step in that process—one wonders whether some official in Dublin has not already visualised it—should be to abolish the distinction between National and Local Government entirely and absorb the officials into the Civil Service. After all, Local Government as we know it is merely a survival of days when the townships, with their merchant princes, were as important in the State as the aristocracy itself. It is an anachronism. Perhaps the Municipal Authorities themselves are anachronisms, for, among the politest things they called the Managerial Act was “a rotten Act forced on the people by officials who despise everything tending towards democratic control.”

Only one representative pleaded for the Act, and his plea was rather for the managers themselves than for the Act. The managers themselves do not need any plea. Everybody must recognise that a trained public servant acting in the public interest is likely to be many times more efficient than even the best committee. He will generally prove to be approachable, scrupulous, and just, and in time will probably become a very popular institution. He is bound to be popular with local officials who are keen about their work. Previously the unfortunate official steered a very uneasy course between the devil of Dublin bureaucrats and the deep sea of committees who did not understand his highly technical reports, and whose favour he had to court to ensure the carrying out of essential services. From his point of view, and from that of the local tradesman and taxpayer, there are few regrets for the past, and the conference of municipal authorities have a bad case.

Party-Ridden

But—and it is a very large but—they have a case, and the defenders of the centralising tendency exemplified in the Local Appointments Commission and the Managers have none except expediency, and expediency might well lead us to curious and rather disturbing conclusions.

Who, after all, are the members of the local councils but the very men from whom we recruit our Dáil and Seanad, and what faults had the old local councils but those of which we accuse the Dáil and Seanad? The Dáil controls the Ministers who, in their turn, control the departmental officials who accuse the local bodies of inefficiency and corruption.

Is centralisation not merely a transference of the centre of weakness up the scale in politics, and if efficiency is our only criterion, could we not make out a very good case for the abolition of the Dáil itself? If we ask ourselves why it is that we alone should be constitutionally incapable of carrying on honest and efficient local administration, we come back to the fact that the councils were bad because they were invariably party-ridden; they excluded good men who disliked parties; they were split into two factions, both far less interested in administration than in securing jobs, houses or other privileges for their own supporters, and that the real business was never done in open council, but in the committee rooms of the Fianna Gael, the Fianna Fail or the Labour Party.

And faction is not confined to local councils, and, in fact, is not entirely unknown in Leinster House itself.

Great Danger

The great danger of centralisation is that, it paralyses initiative throughout the country. Admittedly, there has been little initiative in Ireland, but centralisation is not a method of encouraging it. All it can do is to bleed the country white in the interests of Dublin, the capital. Nothing is more deadly than the cold-blooded efficiency (if he happens to be efficient) of the civil servant, sitting in his office at Government Buildings. I, for one, should feel happier about the Act if I did not believe that from the Civil Service point of view it represented the high water mark of local administration, and that there was no intention in anybody's mind of experimenting further.

I suggest that unless we are prepared to see Local Government absorbed into the machinery of National Government, we should even now be experimenting in particular areas in order to try and discover a system of local administration suitable to ourselves.

Two or three areas might be chosen to begin with: an electoral system might be devised, perhaps on the lines that have been suggested for a Vocational Seanad, and the council should have the advice, not the dictation, of an official in touch with the Ministry.

It is altogether too easy to govern by mandate. It requires imagination to govern through the medium of plain men and women, but that is the only sort of government that counts in the long run.

Sunday Independent, 19 September, 1943

M.O.H.s Are The People's Genuine Friends

1943-09-26

If any young writer is looking for the theme of a novel, let me recommend him to the life of an average Irish Medical Officer of Health. The position is, comparatively speaking, a new one; the study of public health is fresh and lends itself to enthusiasm on the part of the doctor and to indignation on the part of quiet rural communities who enjoy his attentions; the result is drama. The M.O.H.s are, perhaps, the only officials whose activities are a tonic in these days of corroding cynicism.

Before me are two reports from the Medical Officers of two adjoining counties, Galway and Mayo. They differ from the usual medical reports in their more prolific use of scientific jargon, and a certain adolescent fondness for literary tags. I confess I could dispense with both. I have no notion what a man's "widals" may be, nor is my interest in Infant Mortality increased by references to Wordsworth's "Little child that lightly draws its breath." They are the sort of reports of which I spoke last week that pass entirely above the heads of local councillors, and since M.O.H.s have an inspiring story to tell and the average voter, to whom these reports should really be addressed, likes a good story, it would be in everybody's interest if the doctors endeavoured to write so as to be read and understood by the men and women in the cottages.

Both doctors have had to face an outbreak of typhus in the past year, and if our young novelist lacks a great climax for his book, there is drama, crammed down and brimming over, in Dr. McConn's (Co. Galway) account of the Spiddal outbreak. Many of the local people rose in wrath against him: the Parish Council, whose motto, one thinks, should be *gan typhus, gan teangain*, succeeded somehow in dragging the revival of Irish into the row, but in spite of all this, he succeeded in stamping out the disease with the loss of only one life.

Many disturbing reflections rise from these reports. Typhus is produced only by personal uncleanliness, and of 535 schoolchildren examined in Mayo Dr. McCarthv reports that 203 were found to be unclean as regards the head and 119 as regards the body. In Dr. McConn's report we read that of 535 persons examined—the figure being the same for each county is probably a coincidence—289 had unclean heads, 200 unclean bodies, "and 46 were clean." to quote the report.

In Dr. McConn's view the typhus was spread from the national school where for four years, in spite of his protests, there were only 21 coat-hooks for 81 children, so that clean and dirty clothes were thrown together.

"Most Depressing Thing"

It is not a subject one likes to dwell on. Rural populations in Ireland are largely the victims of the land laws of the last century which made it a matter of life and death to appear poorer, dirtier and more ignorant than they were, but these are appalling figures. They make it questionable whether even the revival of Irish can justify parents in sending their children to Irish-speaking districts. But the most depressing thing about it is the cause that Dr. McConn suggests for the outbreak. Far too many Irish country houses have never seen anything more grandiose in the way of coathangers than an ordinary nail yet here are grown men and women who can watch clean clothes thrown on a dirty floor while waiting for heaven to send them coathangers!

Typhoid is another of the M.O.H.'s headaches and likely to remain so, for with the perverseness peculiar to a race which ignores the despotism of fact, we have contrived to make one of the wettest countries of Europe into a miniature Sahara. Scarcely a week passes but one sees in the newspaper a cry for water, and though there is money for Senates, for Irish, for pensions, for armies of Civil Servants, there is never enough money for water.

Where water supplies exist they are often old and unsatisfactory. Eight cases of typhoid occurred in Loughrea. Here the sewers and water mains run alongside each other, and where cracks occur the water is contaminated by the sewage. On the whole, I do not think I shall spend a night in Loughrea!

A slogan displayed everywhere in one European country was; "Soap and water are the friends of mankind." That sort of slogan may be far less inspiring to many people than "Up Dev," "Up the Republic," or "To Hell with England," but it is rather more practical. In the village of Moycullen, where typhoid has now become endemic (that is to say, chronic), Dr. McConn offered to eradicate the disease for at least three years by free inoculations. The offer was refused.

The people of the country need to be reminded that the Medical Officers of Health are their friends, and probably the most genuine friends they are likely to have for many a long day.

Sunday Independent, 26 September, 1943

Fianna Fail's Attitude To PR System

1943-10-03

Anyone who wishes to gain a really comprehensive view of political incapacity would do well to study the proceedings of the Fianna Fail Ard-Fheis.

Fianna Fail, the largest party in the country, lost ground at the recent election. Now, there is always great danger that a political party while it is still a minority, will favour Proportional Representation, but that the moment it gets power it will begin to dislike it. Fianna Fail, having lost a few seats, not only dislikes it, it detests it. We heard, for instance, that England inflicted this unjust system of election on us but not on Northern Ireland, this being the first hint we have had that the Northern Ireland Government meets with the approval of anybody outside its own faction, or that we of the South approve of a system under which our fellow-Catholics are deprived of their just share of influence in the community.

But even stranger, wilder things were said by Mr. de Valera himself. Let us look at some of the things he did say. "When there were no big questions to set people thinking and cause a clear-cut division of opinion, there was a great danger that the public would break up into a series of sectional groups, resulting in the formation of a number of small parties, among the heads of which bargaining would follow which might result in a Coalition Government.... THE PEOPLE IN SHEER DESPERATION MIGHT CHANGE THE SYSTEM BY A REAL REVOLUTION, AS ON THE CONTINENT, OR BY A PLEBISCITE, AS WAS PROVIDED FOR."

Whether the first or second portion of this outburst be the more serious I leave it to my readers to say, but I wish we could call up the ghosts of Swift, Grattan, Tone, Davis and Parnell to answer whether the formation of a Coalition (that is to say, a National) Government would ever by them be regarded as a danger that justified a revolution which would overthrow the whole constitution of a free Ireland and replace it by Dictatorship.

I should like to have asked them which of two courses they would have chosen: that of the Northern Ireland Government in which difference of religion (or, as Mr de Valera would call it. "a big question to set people thinking and cause a clear-cut division of opinion") has been exaggerated into an excuse for enthroning a majority faction and reducing the rest of the population to inertia and despair, or the course which for Mr. de Valera is so beset with danger, of allowing every sectional interest its rightful place in the nation's life in the hope and belief that it will in time unite with other sectional interests for the good of the whole State (or again, in Mr. de Valera's words, "that bargaining will follow which might result in a Coalition Government,"). I think they would have replied to a man that Mr, de Valera's arguments were the very philosophy of faction.

The Continent

But then, "The people in sheer desperation might change the system by a real revolution, as on the Continent." This is the mentality I referred to a few weeks ago when I pointed out that for some people in Ireland "the Continent" never included Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway or Finland, but is always taken to mean a group of Latin States. Even as a statement of what happened in those States it does not contain a single word of truth, for "the people" did not rise up "to change the system of election," as Mr. de Valera would have us believe, any more than similar groups in Ireland which also claim the right to overrule the people's voice do so because they are dissatisfied with the results of Proportional Representation.

But what are we to make of a Statesman, the author of a Constitution which enshrines a certain system of election, who after a few years of that Constitution calmly suggests that "the people" in sheer desperation may be forced to overthrow it by revolution? Have we not had enough of revolutions without making a system of election the ground for another?

Its Aim And Merit

All this, of course, is political incapacity on the grand scale. Proportional Representation, like any other system, is only a machine.

It will not by turning the handle produce a perfect government.

It will not work at all if it is regarded merely as an instrument of securing the largest possible representation to the largest possible faction.

It will not produce "strong" governments in the manner of Northern Ireland, if Northern Ireland is to be our ideal.

Its aim and peculiar merit is precisely what Mr. de Valera considers its weakness: that it tends to iron out factions and produce a balanced representation of the community. If it is to function, that balanced representation must learn to behave itself: to sink its sectional differences and co-operate in the larger issues of national welfare which are the business of us all.

Sunday Independent, 3 October, 1943

Board Of Control For Irish Theatres

1943-10-10

One of the strangest results of the war on Dublin life has remained almost unnoticed. Inquiry at several theatres during the past few weeks has shown crowded houses, and not only the commercial theatres but the art theatres as well. I understand that if the Abbey and Gate theatres had been twice their size they could still have done good business in the past few years. But the peculiar thing is that all the shows—variety, commercial and artistic—were managed and performed by Irish men and women.

That is a great change indeed, because for a hundred years or more our entertainment has been provided for us by cross-Channel companies; our native theatres were run at a loss and our finest actors have earned less even than solicitors' clerks. The big money went to pay the cross-Channel artistes, and since Dublin usually visited in conjunction with Cork, is not what English theatrical companies know as a No. 1 date, we have been worse served than even the provincial cities of Liverpool, Manchester or Birmingham.

There are two reasons for the change. The first is that so many new films have been rejected because of their propaganda content that cinema-goers have had to fall back on the theatres. The second is that the theatres themselves have been unable to secure English companies since the war. The result—cinema fans and theatre-goers alike have had to fall back on the native theatre; Irish actors for the first time in their lives are booked up for months ahead at reasonable salaries and there is actually at the moment a commercial market for good plays by Irish writers. They have not taken advantage of it, and new plays are still largely amateur efforts. The general standard of production is still behind that of foreign companies, though in some companies it must be said that it is considerably higher.

But it is improving, and new plays, no doubt, would come only that the writers feel that the end of the war will see an end of the boom. The first few good films will leave empty rows in the theatres, and the first touring company which arrives with a London success will send Irish actors and playwrights back to their little halls in back lanes.

Now, is this likely to happen? Undoubtedly the cinema is a thorny problem in other countries than this. Even in Great Britain, where there is no shortage of capital, it can only be nursed along by quotas, and in this country it cannot even be established without Government support. But as to the theatres, I find it hard to believe that, when a new and growing industry has established itself without a thank you to anyone and without costing the taxpayer a halfpenny, any Government will permit it to be wiped out overnight by the resumption of theatrical free trade. Undoubtedly, any form of artistic regimentation will have very grave dangers. We all know that there are fanatics who, to impose their own peculiar standards on the rest of us, would exert pressure on Irish companies which they cannot exert on cross-Channel ones. We know, too, that amongst the artistes there will be some who will deal with the whole matter on strictly Trades Union principles and keep out the Old Vic or Sadlers Wells as cheerfully as they would keep out some third-class touring company. That would result in artistic stagnation and send audiences back to the picture houses within a year. However, we must remember that we have seen none of the blessings that control could confer. At the moment the entertainment industry is busily stopping gaps with anything that comes handy, but given security of tenure, it could produce talent on a scale we have never seen before.

It could for the first time give us an Irish theatrical profession, and now, and not when the dykes of war break down, is the time to give it that security.

Further, I suggest that since it is one of those matters from which the absence of Civil Servants would count as half the battle, the theatre managers would do well to establish a Board of Control themselves on a voluntary basis, giving representation on it to Irish actors and playwrights. If they do not do so, I am afraid they will wake one fine morning to find it has been done for them in a manner which neither they nor the public will like.

Sunday Independent, 10 October, 1943

Eire's Choice—Food or Money

1943-10-17

An ironic commentary on Mr. de Valera's speech at Clonmel in which he referred with considerable scorn to people who think only of the "real" and the "useful," "forgetting that spiritual interests are more important than material interests," was provided in the space of exactly three days by the Minister for Supplies, who painted a most alarming picture of the coming year, and jolted us down from the high "spiritual" plane of his leader's speech. At the beginning of the war, Great Britain, determined on preventing a repetition of the inflation which generally arises as a result of high wages and shortage of commodities, clogged down wages and enforced a rationing and price regulating scheme which made it nearly certain that even if a man earned two hundred pounds a week, he could not feed or clothe himself better than his neighbour who only earned two. In effect, instead of money, it arranged to pay its citizens in promises to pay—after the war. On the whole, the scheme has worked very well.

Northern Visitors

We also endeavoured to control inflation by pegging down wages, but we avoided the necessity for rationing which appeared too troublesome. Though our imports were drastically reduced, in fact to the bare minimum which our neighbours felt would permit us to exist, we continued to export our produce, rather in the manner of the English factory workers, in return for promises to pay—after the war. The shortage of materials made it appear at first as though we were faced with a terrible unemployment problem, but this situation was eased when thousands of unemployed went across-Channel. These men are paid fairly good wages, but in common with the rest of Britain's workers, they are not permitted to spend them. Instead they send them home to their wives, who are in a position to spend them. Financially, many people are, as anyone can see, better off than they have been for a long time. There is plenty of money, but at the same time this is being balanced by a decreasing amount of commodities, and, of course, the result has been that prices have steadily gone up, and are likely to continue going up.

At the same time we have actually built up quite a substantial tourist trade with the North of Ireland: all our visitors being in possession of considerable sums which a wise Government refuses to allow them to spend at home, but which our Government permits them to spend here. They, too, have richly rewarded us—in promises to pay after the war. The food and clothing which the harassed Eire housewife, trying to carry on her home on a pre-war salary, cannot afford to buy for herself and her children is being calmly consumed by our visitors. And some people are so foolish, so criminal, that they assist them by lending them their ration books. Meat, potatoes, milk, butter, eggs, and vegetables: the essentials of existence are becoming too dear to be bought out of any ordinary salary; the workers are demanding increases, and Mr. Lemass has warned us that the time may come when he cannot any longer control inflation and money will become almost worthless. For this he seems to blame only the farmers, who, he says, regard the production of essential foods as a matter of bargaining with the community rather than as a national duty.

Must Organise

I have a feeling that whenever an Irish Minister doesn't know what to do he has one simple rule: "Attack the farmers." As long as the community is not organised as a community, as in other countries, we all bargain with it. The farmers are trying to force up prices on the consumers, and the shopkeepers—another easy mark—are forcing up prices on the farmers in order to balance the losses they have incurred by having practically nothing to sell.

The fact is there is a gigantic national loss, and, instead of trying to share it out equally, we are compelling each section to pass on as much of it as possible to the next. If Mr. Lemass really wishes to avoid inflation he must take steps to freeze the useless promises to pay which are flooding the country, and make the amount of money circulated correspond more closely to the amount of goods for sale. That implies rationing and price control on a scale never previously attempted, and it may well be that we cannot do it at all unless, like the people of other countries, we say: "We're all in this together," and face it as a united, disciplined people. We shall get nothing organised as long as we have politicians going about the country telling the people that, really, these things do not matter.

Sunday Independent, 17 October, 1943

What Kind of Tourists Do We Want?

1943-10-24

The Irish Tourist Association is a very live body. One may disagree with it in detail, but nobody who remembers what travelling in Ireland was like before its establishment will fancy that its officials spend their time with their legs on the mantelpiece.

Its annual luncheon showed it in an unduly penitential mood. It appears that after four years of idleness its well-disciplined army of restaurateurs and hotel-keepers, at the first sight of the contingent of tourists from Northern Ireland, broke ranks and fell on the unfortunates. The coming year may show which of the parties to this transaction was really stung, but I welcome the self-critical spirit as an indication that the Association is still alive. Its responsibilities have increased rather than diminished because of the State recognition accorded to its work by the establishment of the Tourist Board.

Ireland has many advantages as a tourist centre, but it also has many drawbacks, and it is worth while examining them in the same spirit of friendly criticism.

One is that hotels, restaurants and such like tend to keep to the living standard of the community, and the living standard in Ireland is very low. Something may be done by government control and by the provision of proper training for chefs and hotel keepers, but the fundamental work must be done in the schools and at home. Until Irish people are taught to demand better service and cooking, it will be hard to persuade the catering industry to give it to them.

National Monuments

I am not always quite certain what the Association means by the Tourist Trade, or, indeed, what the Government means by it. Does it mean tourism as understood on the continent or tourism as understood in Llandudno and Cowyn Bay? I have a suspicion that the "tripper" is very much in everybody's mind, and I feel that even if we could successfully compete with Margate or Blackpool for his favours we should not be securing the most remunerative element in the business. Our eyes should be across the Atlantic, not across the Channel: we are on the main Atlantic route, the gateway to the civilisation of Europe, and our visitors are likely to be attracted less by a noise and glitter which they can do much better at home for longer periods of the year than by the quality of what we can give them.

When it comes to quantity the small country is always foolish to compete. That is why I should be better pleased if the Association paid rather more attention to the literature it produces. Occasionally it is well written by professional writers; sometimes it is sloppily written, badly printed and produced.

As well as the inevitable guide books. I should like to see some tastefully produced hand-books, well written and illustrated, which would deal not only with purely scenic attractions, but with such specialised attractions of the educated man as Irish abbeys and Big Houses. The most welcome news the Association has given us is Mr. Lemass's statement that the Government are considering something I have advocated in this column: the preservation of the Big Houses and of other national monuments.

High Standards

Obviously our present methods of preservation are not likely to impress visitors. They would find our churches turned into ball alleys, and young men playing handball over fifteenth century carved tombs. They would find fortified town houses still being torn down to make way for cinemas. Personally, I believe the work should be done by the Tourist Board. If they adopted the procedure of Great Britain and made a small charge for admission the scheme could in many places be made self supporting.

I suggest to the Association to set its own standards high: to look after the quality and the quantity will look after itself.

Sunday Independent, 24 October, 1943

Have Our Politicians Grown Too Old

1943-10-31

A few weeks ago Prof. Michael Hayes drew attention to the fact that the average age of Dáil members was now in the region of sixty. A day or two later Mr. de Valera's sixty-first birthday gave point to the fact, and a speech he delivered at the same time in Clonmel was sufficiently reminiscent of our schooldays to remind us that none of us is growing younger.

Yet there is no sign of a change in the Dáil. In ten years' time, to all appearances, we shall have a parliament of an average age of seventy, and the mind boggles at the thought of what conditions might be like ten years from that.

Yet even the keenest political observers confess that they can see no sign of a new party arising.

That is a peculiarity of Irish politics caused by the fact that our history is largely revolutionary, and there is no tradition of the normal evolution of political ideas. We are a race with an enormous time-lag to make up, and our activity is concentrated into the space of a few feverish years which then give place to long and dreary periods in which nothing whatever happens.

Old Irish Party

The old Irish Party which in its heyday was probably more brilliant and certainly more revolutionary than Sinn Féin, lived 25 years too long. It was never re-energised from within as political parties in other countries are, and nothing could have been hazier than its political conceptions towards the close of its career.

As it grew more skilful in political warfare, the warfare was turned towards political opponents at home, and we got a dreary atmosphere of cynicism and futility which nobody who knew the period is ever likely to forget. When challenged by Sinn Féin after 1916, it could not even put up a good fight. It had lost the capacity for speaking to young men and women in any language they understood.

It is unfortunately only too obvious that our politicians have now reached the state reached by the Irish Party, and in many ways the present-day provides parallels which remind us of the first decade of the century. The main impulse is gone. Just as the heroes of the Land War went about the country unaware that the battle of their lives was won and that they needed an entirely new approach to politics, our ancient politicians drift from meeting to meeting aimlessly talking about the revival of Irish, and young men and women describe it all as "a racket."

What is Necessary

Mr. Lemass, speaking at a meeting in Trinity College, declared, for instance, that "capitalism was as dead as feudalism," and that "the system of personal gain had died because the growth of political democracy had placed power in the hands of people who wanted social justice." But the President of the Philosophical Society described his youthful self as a Gladstonian Liberal who believed that nothing good had happened since 1856!

If this is a symptom of the political inertia of the universities, it makes one wonder where exactly our next Government is to come from.

The immediate necessity is that young men and women who are interested in politics should start getting together: not for the purpose of forming political parties but to educate the existing political parties. The one thing which is not possible in political life is the atmosphere of general discussion, and this could be supplied by clubs like the early Fabian Society. We know that we have all the machinery for providing ourselves with a decent educational system, with a healthy population and a reasonable chance of development in

the post-war world. The trouble is that with all this machinery we have little of the expert direction that will make it work.

Sunday Independent, 31 October, 1943

Irish—And How To Revive It

1943-11-07

Mr. de Valera continues his campaign for the revival of Irish. It is certainly one of the most peculiar campaigns ever undertaken by the Premier of a modern State. It is apparently to be a one-man job; its fundamental assumption that the people can be induced to revive the Irish language if they can be got to say “*Gaillimh*” instead of “*Galway*” and “*Slan Leat*” instead of “*Cheerio*.”

Compulsory Irish is not to be extended to the Dáil. Irish is necessary for doctors but not for politicians. It is all very confusing, but of one thing we can be certain. If Mr. de Valera is going to provide us with national equivalents for all the expressions like “cheerio” which spring up and die within a month, he will have his work cut out. The remains of the Irish language will be decently interred under a tombstone inscribed (in pure American) “O.K.”

There is no difficulty whatever about restoring Irish as the national language, provided we want to restore it, and provided particularly that it is *the language* we want to revive. Irish declined because in a complex European civilisation it was a peasant medium of expression suited to a world of four hand reels and folk songs.

Wider Horizons

Referring to the reluctance of people fresh from school to speak Irish, Mr. de Valera said that you can bring a horse to water but you can't make him drink. He might have added that you can't persuade any horse that stagnant water is a running stream. Why does Mr. de Valera dodge the facts? The only cause for the disappearance of the Irish language has been and still is the intellectual supremacy of English. This has been strengthened enormously by Americanism, and I think it is true that the average intelligent boy or girl will prefer American magazines and films to their English equivalents simply because they represent wider horizons.

We should have no difficulty in reviving Irish if it were made the language of wider horizons.

The Government's idea of these horizons is represented by the Government Publications Department which produces translations of out-of-date English classics. Rarely if ever has it produced an up-to-date readable book. And yet people would buy and read a good illustrated paper in Irish or a good monthly magazine with informative and controversial articles. They would go to see a theatrical company if it performed good plays in Irish. The test is not the willingness of the people to make use of Irish, but the standard of what is presented to them in the language. That intellectual supremacy of English is something we must recognise if we seek to challenge it, and the trouble about many revivalists is that they do not even recognise it, so that they are exasperated and bewildered by the simplest obstacles.

To be practical: if Mr. de Valera really wishes to save the national language in our own time, he must establish a publishing organisation and an entertainment board entirely free of Government interference and under the control of those who are capable of directing them.

Sunday Independent, 7 November, 1943

An Irish Legion Of Honour

1943-11-14

I wrote here a few weeks ago about the Medical Officers of Health, and suggested them to young writers as an inspiring subject for novel or drama. Now there has just been published a book, "The State of Medicine in Ireland,"* but this I hesitate to recommend to any writer, unless, perhaps, some nasty, hard-baked novelist who has no illusions about society. Obviously, the author feels much the same, for he sketches very cautiously and without any great affection the picture of a powerful professional class sparring for place with a moribund Department of Local Government, while the patient, uncomplaining people of Ireland pick up whatever unconsidered trifles the two mighty combatants let fall.

Affection and passion come into it only when he proceeds to deal with medical education. Here he lays down principles which seem to me impeccable for any form of education, medical or otherwise. He feels it is necessary "to simplify the pre-graduate course as far as possible so that it may be suitable as a basis for all doctors, whatever their subsequent careers may be." This is the same thing as I have argued here in another connection, against the application of specialised education at the wrong end, so that we find ourselves with three independent systems of education all producing junior clerks. We must learn that the modern world is so organised that the best thing education can do for us is to teach us the general principles on which all specialised activities will later be based.

I am not so happy about another pronouncement of the author dealing with the export of doctors. "It is indeed doubtful," he writes, "if it is in the national interest that we should train up a large group of young people at considerable expense and then make a present of them to other countries. As has been pointed out by one of our professors of economics, we should consider such a course mad if the students were thoroughbred horses." Now, on the surface that looks like good national housekeeping, but in spite of my reluctance to disagree with a doctor and a professor of economics on their own subjects, it looks to me like pretty good nonsense.

Thoroughbred horses have a recognised market value at home and abroad, but outside of certain independent states in Africa, I know of no market for healthy young medical students, and even then I feel the students themselves might hold unpatriotic objections to being used for the purpose of balancing the national budget. In other words, it is one of those pretty pictorial analogies which mean nothing whatever, and in practice we should be on our knees thanking heaven for a country which will accept young professional men from us. Large middle-class families such as we have in Ireland are not going to export sons and daughters as labourers and maidservants merely to oblige the economists.

But the author is at his most earnest and best in arguing that, while medical education in Ireland has always been sound on the practical end, it has almost ignored the theoretical one, and that it cannot get away with it any longer. "Pure clinical medicine taught by practising physicians and surgeons is no longer able to compete in research with the scientific medicine whose medical teachers are engaged upon whole-time research and teaching. Hence, in our pure clinical school in Dublin there is little or no opening for the young doctor who wishes to devote his life to the advancement of medical science. For instance, the almost religious attitude towards research of the chosen few who gain admission to the Johns Hopkins School could not even be begun to be understood here." This is a point of extreme importance, which again, I feel, the doctor should have argued into a general principle, for of course, it is not confined to medicine. It is the difference between a career and a vocation, and, for some extraordinary reason, this distinction is always in Ireland confined to the religious life. Outside of that a man's social value is reckoned in terms of the salary he can command, and the disinterested intellectual activity of scientists, scholars and writers is looked on as folly. We have suffered considerably from this in the decline of our intellectual prestige, and we shall suffer still more.

Prior to the last war, in Germany, then a great exponent of the scientific method, the social system gave considerable honour to all pure, intellectual activity. Here, unfortunately, honorary degrees in our universities have been degraded to the level of Christmas cards, but something might be done to break down the dull-witted utilitarian attitude by the establishment of something of the nature of an Irish Legion of Honour. By exclusiveness it might succeed in reminding our people that there are, after all, other tests of greatness besides those recognised by the local bank manager.

**The State of Medicine in Ireland*, by W. R. P. Collis, M.D., F.R.C.P.I (Parkside Press, 2/6).

Sunday Independent, 14 November, 1943

In Fond And Loving Memory—

1943-11-21

Mrs. X—, poor soul, has never been quite the same since her husband's death. Tom and herself were so deeply attached! They had been married for eighteen years and were as fond of one another at the end as in the first year of married life. To my own personal knowledge she has refused two excellent offers, though as you know, poor Tom didn't leave her in the best of circumstances. She says no one else can ever take his place in her heart.

The enlargement of the wedding group is hanging over the mantelpiece, and sometimes when the children, Gertie and Billy, are at the pictures she sits and looks at it and has a little cry to herself. Over his grave she has put up a handsome Celtic cross which must have cost her the best part of a hundred pounds, with an inscription beginning: "In Fond and Loving Memory." But the really remarkable thing is that since the day the cross was put up, she and Gertie and Billy have only twice looked inside the graveyard gate to see what poor Tom's grave was like and those occasions were immediately after the funeral. They might get a shock if they did so now. Somebody has put his heel through the glass cover of the wreath sent by the staff; the grave is covered with weeds and the railing about it—as much as you can see of it—is rusty. Poor Tom, who hated slovenliness in anybody! Reading the inscription you might think cynically; "Mrs. X—'s memory was more loving than long." And you would be wrong.

Not Hard To Explain

There is nothing very hard to explain in all this. It doesn't mean, as Mrs. X's apologists would like us to believe, that Mrs. X's thoughts rise above the merely bodily plane. It is simply one of our bad legacies from the Penal Days.

In all countries the churchyard was always part of the church and received the same supervision as the church. Here, the church was destroyed (anyway, it was very often a monastery church in some inaccessible position) and while our people continued to worship as best they could, they buried their dead in and about ruined churches, where there was no supervision; and soon the cemetery took on the neglected appearance of the church. Notice for instance that we always say "graveyard," not "churchyard."

Even in our own time it is very hard to blame poor people for keeping the cemetery in a bad state, when the National Monuments Commission permit the sanctuary of the church to be used as a ball alley.

Consequently, Mrs. X, like the rest of us, was brought up to look on the cemetery as a place where you quite naturally expected to be stung to death with nettles, to wrench your ankle in a bit of buried ironwork, and put your heel through the glass covering a wreath; where bits of broken coffin and heaps of unburied bones were thrown against the cemetery wall. The only attention the dead expected was a sort of free fight between the well-to-do families as to which could afford to erect the largest and ugliest monument, though a tiny fraction of the sum spent on these would have enabled the whole cemetery to be kept neat and beautiful. It isn't that Mrs. X doesn't know better. She has a friend, a nun in the local convent, and sometimes they go and sit in the community cemetery, with its neat rows of plain tasteful crosses. She never visits the cemetery where her own husband lies because it is badly kept and tasteless, and nobody has ever told her that it is her duty not to let it remain so.

Making Of Wills

It is curious that Irish people rarely put aside a small sum in their wills for the upkeep of their graves, as is common in other countries.

It is even stranger that we have no custom such as exists elsewhere of decorating the graves on one particular Sunday in the year.

Then the whole cemetery is cleaned up; the grass is cut and the railings painted; exiles abroad send home money for flowers, and all day long there is a constant stream of visitors coming to decorate the graves of their own kindred. In the afternoon the graveyard is ablaze with flowers. Now, in these columns I have tried to suggest that we must repair our broken traditions: we must try and get behind the breach torn in them by the Penal Days. Where the local church has been ruined it should, wherever possible be restored; where the customs that make for an ordered society have been broken down they should be built up again. One of the customs that has broken down most completely is that piety by which all civilised people remember and honour their dead.

Sunday Independent, 21 November, 1943

Levelling The Community Down

1943-11-28

A fascinating example of the technique of democratic policies is afforded by the discussion on The Children's Allowances Bill now before the Dáil. Here is a measure which the Minister who introduces it blandly declares will not induce a sinner in Ireland to marry and have children; which practically every deputy speaks to with distrust; which will cost the country two and a half millions a year, but which will probably become law without single dissenting voice. Why? Because of the fear of a section of the community whom the Bill is supposed to benefit and who are not amenable to argument. It could only be defeated if one of the opposition parties were prepared to take office and bring in a more comprehensive measure, and apparently none of them is.

In this connection there is a melancholy interest in referring to the really admirable article by Mr. Blythe on the subject in the *Muinntir na Tire Handbook* for the present year. He has thought out the question from the point of view of the employer. The average wage in a factory where he was employed was £2 10s. The single man paid 25/- for board and lodging, and could spend the rest on clothes and amusement. The married man with a wife and children was for ever in debt and running to the office for a little advance to settle this liability or that. That is the problem. Unless the cost of living figure goes up further, Beveridge proposes an allowance of 8/- per week per child, after the first child and with the first child if the man is unemployed. Unless the value of money drops considerably, Mr. Blythe thinks this more than his country could afford.

The Wealthy Families

On the other hand, he believes that anything less than 6/- would be useless. At this figure, by withholding the grant from wealthy families, the cost could be brought down to about £8,000,000. But even this he considers would only be a beginning in the fight to prevent a decline in the birth rate, and hundreds of other privileges would be necessary, such as special rates for rent, gas, electricity, travelling etc.

The only excuse for any scheme of children's allowances is that it would provide a reasonable amount of social security and increase the birth and marriage rates. Obviously, whatever you may think of it, Mr. Blythe's scheme does do that. It is equally obvious that the present scheme, which allows 2/6 per week per child after the second child, does nothing of the sort. What does it do? The Minister tells us, again very frankly, that it compels those with small families to put their hands in their pockets and assist those with large ones. In other words, it is merely an extension of the dole; a form of outdoor relief. It will not affect the birth or marriage rates because it is intended principally for people who would marry and have large families, no matter what social conditions were like, and when deputies suggested that the money had better be paid to the mother, they were defining a suspicion in all their minds that most of those whom it was intended to benefit were incapable of being benefited by it.

For people like that the problem of social security scarcely exists.

Richer—Or Poorer

When the Minister says that those with small families must put their hands in their pockets to assist those with large ones, he implies something that simply is not true—that the married artisan or labourer with one or two children, who is doing his best by them is better off than the slum dweller with ten.

He isn't; he is poorer in the exact degree of his own sense of responsibility before God towards his family and society.

Undoubtedly, many deserving families will benefit a little, but not sufficiently to make it worth the enormous cost. I must confess that I look with alarm on all this social legislation which aims at levelling the community down instead of up, which addresses itself to the slums and ignores that great mass of responsible, prudent, decent citizens—the teachers, policemen, civil servants and tradesmen—who are capable of bringing up their children well and who should be encouraged to be the fathers and mothers of the future.

Sunday Independent, 28 November, 1943

Paid £1000 For Being A Good Citizen!

1943-12-05

A correspondent has very kindly sent me a cutting which almost explains itself without comment from either of us. It tells us that the Director of the Glasgow Galleries has been awarded a prize of £1,000 “for pre-eminence in good citizenship.” That looks a lot of money to pay a man for being a good citizen. But wait a moment, please.

“His vigour and judgment,” the paragraph goes on, “have made the Glasgow Galleries what they should be—a popular place of recreation for the citizen. In the year 1942-3 nearly a million visitors were attracted by international exhibitions, concerts, and talks to the main gallery in Kelvingrove alone.” Just that! Need I say more? Yes: one sentence culled from that admirable *Muinntir na Tire Handbook* which I referred to last week. It is a quotation from one of the founders of the Danish Folk High Schools: “I found out at once that we could do something with those who were 18 and over, while we could do nothing with those who were under 18.”

In Ireland—What?

Now, ask yourself what is the position of the Irish man or woman of 18 or over who wants to do something for himself. In Dublin you can attend the theatres—very good theatres—and an odd orchestral concert. If you are comparatively well-to-do you can join the Royal Dublin Society and hear very good chamber music and reasonably good educational talks. If you aren't, the Institute of Higher Studies last year provided a series of afternoon lectures on Early Welsh Poetry—stimulating intellectual diet!

The younger and more energetic officials of the Museum organised one admirably arranged exhibition at least, but I am informed that the Department frowned on it and refused them any financial aid. As for such things as International Exhibitions, popular chamber music concerts, evening lectures or so on—sorry! Nothing doing! Now perhaps you will understand my correspondent's implication that if the people of Glasgow got all this for £1,000, the people of Glasgow made a good Scottish bargain.

As for the rest of the country. let me quote again from the *Muinntir na Tire Handbook*—

“After exhaustive inquiries one must reluctantly come to the conclusion that Adult Education in any sort of coherent or organised form does not exist in our country.”

After that, surely I may be forgiven for saying that Irish educational and cultural institutions have simply fallen down on the job.

In the early days of the No. 1 Army Band we got good band concerts in the provinces, and nobody can pretend that we did not appreciate them. Where are the bands to-day? Does a single picture ever leave our main galleries for exhibition in the country, or a single exhibit ever get back to its native heath when once it has reached the Museum? Yet, merely from the overflow of these institutions one could organise a whole series of travelling exhibitions.

The Librarians

The librarians are so busily concerned about the things people should not read that they never seem to think of the things people should read and be coaxed or bullied into reading; and I doubt if there is a single provincial town where there are regular series of lectures and gramophone concerts and exhibitions of one sort or another. The fact is that from Radio Eireann down to the County Libraries and Vocational Schools, we are cursed with an army of people who were once energetic young men and women and are now merely officials, concerned with filling up forms, their greatest fear that sometime, by mistake, they may do something that will get into the newspapers. But they will all agree that the ignorance

throughout the country on many subjects is awful! It is the duty of anybody who has anything to do with education to get our officials to stop their grumbling and do some work. If you haven't a library in your town and village, you should see that you get one; and where there is a library there should be lectures and exhibitions and concerts of classical music even if you only have a portable gramophone. Real enthusiasts like the Irish Film Society have sent out lecturers to other places. They might send one to you. And if the galleries and museums will not let you have exhibits from their bulging cellars, then get your local T.D. to inquire in the Dáil what the reason is. There isn't any reason, of course, or rather, there are always reasons innumerable for doing nothing at all.

Sunday Independent, 5 December, 1943

Getting a Toy For Christmas

1943-12-12

Johnny knew exactly what he wanted for Christmas. He wanted a battleship with masts and funnels and any amount of guns.

“Mummy,” he said, “will you buy me a battleship?”

So his mother went into the toyshop, but her heart fell when she saw the prices marked on the wooden toys, for she knew it meant they would have to go hungry over Christmas if Johnny got a present.

“A battleship, ma’am,” said the shopkeeper. “Here’s a nice one for fifteen shillings.”

“Haven’t you anything cheaper?” she asked, for that was as much as she had to spend in the whole week.

“No. ma’am,” he said. “The cost of timber is dreadful.”

“Want, a battleship!” shouted Johnny.

“But I can take a deposit, from you. ma’am,” said the shopkeeper. “That’s what most poor people are doing, buying by instalments.”

So Johnny’s mother, who was of an incurably hopeful disposition, put down a deposit of sixpence and the battleship was put aside for her. The trouble was—where she was to get the other sixpences.

For A Few Pence

Johnny’s daddy was out of work. He had tried to go to England, but the doctor wouldn’t pass him because of the pain in his chest. He coughed a lot—the cellar they lived in was damp—and whenever he coughed he clutched his breast.

It was either a battleship or no dinner, or a dinner and no battleship.

Johnny’s mother wouldn’t have hesitated, but she didn’t like to suggest it to her husband who was sometimes depressed because he couldn’t get work, and might think she meant it was his fault that Johnny had no toys. So she took Johnny into town to see if she couldn’t get him something for a shilling. There was a very nice battleship for twenty two and six which caught Johnny’s eye.

“Want a battleship!” he bawled

“Toys are a terrible price,” said a respectable man who was standing by. “It’s sinful extravagance to spend good money on such rubbish.”

Johnny didn’t know what sinful extravagance meant, so he only looked at the man with hate in his heart and bawled: “Want a battleship!” Then the man blushed and went away. Maybe he remembered when he was Johnny’s age he had wanted one too. Johnny’s mother’s eyes were very red as she steered him howling out of the Christmas crowds. It was the same in the queue for the bus. Johnny screamed and wanted to go back, and she had to explain to all the people round that toys were a terrible price and poor people couldn’t afford them. They all nodded and said it was awful.

Beautiful Dream

He was still sobbing when she got him home, and her husband’s face grew white. He got up and went out without a word, and she was afraid he had gone to the “pub.” Then she rocked Johnny to sleep in her arms, and while he slept he dreamt the most beautiful dream.

He dreamt the whole sky was a Christmas tree—with stars for candles, and on every bough there were toys and no prices at all on them, and on the topmost bough with a whole cluster of stars about it was a great big battleship. There was a tall, sad, smiling Figure standing beneath the tree, clutching his breast just like Holy God in the chapel and when

He saw Johnny looking at Him, He reached up His arm, took down the battleship and laid it in Johnny's arms.

And when Johnny woke, there it was still, a real battleship, and his father was lying in the bed with his hand clutching his breast, and for a while Johnny couldn't distinguish between the face of the Figure in his dream and his father's sleeping face on the pillow.

Sunday Independent, 12 December, 1943

Ben Mayo Writes To Santa Claus

1943-12-19

Dear Santa Claus—I know there are times when you must be tempted to give us nothing at all for Christmas, but before you set out on your journey this year I want you to have a look at a few things that were said by our Lord Mayor the other day. It will show you that we are not all as undeserving as you might think. The fact is, dear Santa, that we're in an awful mess at home, with mother going about wringing her hands and saying what a great family we were before the Bulls took everything off us. All that, of course, may be true, but mother's law case against the Bulls has already cost us a lot more than they took from us, and, anyway it doesn't help to keep the youngsters properly fed.

You know yourself what things at home are like. For reasons that you may know, many of our people have never been able to live in proper villages like the people elsewhere, only in mud cabins and cottages along the roads and up the mountains, and, of course, most of them have never had electric lighting or proper water supplies. You see barefoot children tramping miles to school in the rain, and there they may not have proper light or water either, nor even a place to hang their wet clothes. In school they are taught to read the works of Eoghan Ruadh O'Suilleabhain and Shakespeare, but not to mend their clothes, improve their homes, cook their dinners, or look after their health.

Most of the people in the country parts have very little amusement, for lots of quite decent people seem to think they shouldn't have any amusement at all, and any District Justice with a grouse can stop them. Really Santa, in some ways it's much worse than Lappland!

Slums And Doles

I suppose people crowd into the towns in every country in the world, and I suppose, since city people are smarter in the ways of cities than country people are, they do make a mess in the way of slums. But in other countries I doubt if life is so dull and if the people in the country are so unaccustomed to communal life as ours have been.

Some of the world's worst slums are at our own door in Dublin. Lots of people want to knock down the slums and build new houses and flats, and the Government gives the poor people doles of various kinds. Now, that, dear Santa, would be all very well if we had stopped making slums, but you can see for yourself that the greatest mass migration of labour since the Famine is now taking place, and that when the war is over thousands of these people, pushed back from England, will not go back again to the cabins and the dull evenings, but settle down in the grand new flats the Corporation has built, and then there will be a danger that our slums will become worse than ever.

So you see, if you are going to give us anything, you ought to begin down there with the people in the cottages in the real country parts, where all the trouble begins; instead of giving them flats in Dublin, give them properly laid out villages, with churches and schools and libraries and village halls, where they can have lectures and dance and perform plays and have all the things grown up people need for a proper social life: and where they will learn in proper schools how to use their hands and brains, and cook and mend and improve their houses.

The Lord Mayor only spoke half the truth when he said that what we needed was prosperity for the countryside, because you can't have a prosperous countryside without contented, educated people to live in it; and not only would they be better citizens when they left it, but most of them wouldn't want to leave it at all. City life has many attractions, but it is an artificial life, and the greatest gift it can give us is to teach us how to dispense with the necessity for it.

Wishing you a prosperous journey, uninterrupted by "flak", I remain, dear Santa,

Yours sincerely,
BEN MAYO

Sunday Independent, 19 December, 1943

And A Law Was Passed That Ireland Again Be Part Of Dublin

1943-12-26

In the total destruction of Dublin in the year 1964 civilised existence appeared almost to have ceased for a period of weeks. Even robbery and violence ceased as people realised that they led nowhere—they starved just the same! Then the government of the city was taken over by a tiny handful of the intelligentsia: a Businessman, a Doctor, an Engineer and a Trades Union Official. They set up their headquarters in a tin shed in the ruins of Parliament House in College Green.

Their first task was to feed what remained of the population, and that was done by the Businessman. The rations were barely enough to keep body and soul together, but the citizens didn't mind that. They knew nobody else, even the Businessman himself, got any more.

The Engineer got a lot of men together to put a roof on the G.P.O., and the Doctor opened a clinic there. At last they were in a position to establish a school in what was once Trinity College, and found a teacher amongst the workers in the G.P.O.

"I don't, care what you think," said the Engineer, "but I want boys and girls who will help to rebuild the city. I want them all taught to use their hands."

"What about Greek?" asked the Teacher.

"One job at a time, please," said the Businessman.

"My party is pledged to the study of Greek," said the Teacher, "If there is to be faction fighting there won't be any city," said the Engineer.

So, they passed a law that no one was to dissipate the energy of the citizens on dissensions, and they put an old Cabinet-maker in place of the Teacher.

"I shall want the children every day from two to six to help in clearing the ruins," said the Engineer.

"What?" cried the Cabinet-maker, "Child labour?"

"I don't mind what sort of labour it is," said the Engineer, "so long as it works."

So every afternoon the children worked with their parents among the ruins, and thought, it great fun and that is why in the whole of Dublin at the end of 1964, they did not know what the word "cornerboy" meant.

Skilled And Unskilled

After a week or two the Trade Union Official came before the Committee of Four and said: "The Cement and Concrete Makers Union objects to the introduction of Unskilled labour."

"Never mind," said the Engineer "I shan't be long turning it into skilled labour."

"Too bad," said the Doctor "Several members of the Union are patients at my clinic. Of course they'll have to find another doctor."

"But there isn't another doctor," said the Trades Union Official. "I think I'd better report back."

"I think so," said the Engineer. So they didn't hear any more of that.

Then they tore down the whole of the old city and built a new one, the finest they could imagine, and the city began to spread till its agricultural hinterland reached to Drogheda.

Now, all this time the rest of Ireland had been jealously watching its growth and at last some of its representatives appeared before the Committee of Four.

"How do you manage about unemployment?" they asked.

"Unemployment", cried the Committee, all together. "What's that?"

"Well, we don't rightly know," said the Irish representatives, "but we've got it."

“Haven’t you soil to till?” said the Businessman, “Haven’t you children to feed? Don’t talk nonsense.”

So the rest of Ireland asked to be included and a law was passed “That Ireland be again considered part of Dublin,”

But then someone discovered that a General Election was overdue, and the two great parties reemerged and entered the field. I do not want you to think the people of the City were ungrateful, but however it happened, the whole Committee of Four forfeited their deposits.

The Government offered them seats in the Senate instead, but their replies would not be suitable to this page. The Trades Union official is now running a series of chain stores for the Businessman and is supposed to be nearly as rich as his boss; the Engineer imported a luxurious car from abroad and is earning £2000 a year, and nobody except a Businessman or an Engineer could afford to pay the fees that the Doctor demands.

Nothing remains of their work but the magnificent city of Dublin with its miles of beautifully laid out streets and its industrious and thriving population.

Ar scath a cheile seadh mhaireann na duoine.

Sunday Independent, 26 December, 1943

Pouring Millions Down The Drain Of Artificial Idleness

1944-01-02

If, by way of a Christmas present, you had given your wife ten pounds to buy a new rigout, and if your wife had come back and said: "I couldn't afford to buy a proper dress with what you gave me, but there is great unemployment amongst the dressmakers, so I gave them five pounds for charity," what would you have said? Yet every week of our lives we are paying out that five pounds in unemployment assistance because we are told we cannot possibly afford the fifteen pounds for the things we need.

This is our oddest inheritance from the economics of pre-Treaty Ireland. It is part of the economics of artificially-created scarcity—oranges, coffee and wheat dumped in the sea for fear there should be food enough for everybody; men and women left, sitting on walls and standing at corners because those whose duty it is to see that they have work are content to pay them the nationally destructive "dole" for doing nothing.

Asset Or Liability?

The real question we must ask ourselves is whether 70,000 men and women are an asset or a liability. To-day they are a liability, and you and I must support them out of our own earnings. Not only that, but it is insisted that we shall support them in such a way that they can produce nothing, just as the British authorities insisted that the victims of the great Famine of '48 must be relieved only in such a way that their work could be of no possible use to Ireland, so that these unfortunates were compelled to construct useless roads that led nowhere.

Since the Treaty our unemployed have cost us the price of many Shannon Schemes and many beet factories, which would by now have been paying us dividends, but we have not even as much as a useless mountain road to show for it.

With the Children's Allowance Act on the way, they are going to cost us a great deal more in the future.

Against this you can set the other view, which happens to be my own, that it is absolute nonsense to say that 70,000 men and women can ever be anything but an asset to the community. We have a good example of that at the moment when so many of them have gone across the water. Employment has mysteriously sprung up there. Nobody pretends that it is "economic" employment. It is merely that our unemployed have been transferred from the debit to the credit side of the ledger, and that even "unskilled" labour has been transformed into "skilled" labour in a matter of weeks. That miracle has nothing to do with Capitalism or Socialism;

It simply means that no country struggling for its life can tolerate idleness.

We still tolerate and even encourage it in Eire. Nobody pretends that there is not work crying out to be done. In our slums alone we have work enough for the "unemployed" for a generation.

Great Needs

Our villages and towns need houses and water and electric light; our schools are a generation behind those of any other country in Europe. To go no further in the quest for work which can be done by our army of unemployed, there are our graveyards, which would give us some return for all our doles and allowances.

But no! The Gravediggers, Gardeners, and Ancient Monuments Restorers' Union would object to the employment of "unskilled" labour, so you and I must continue to find more

millions to be poured down the drain of artificial idleness.

That seems to me to be economic insanity. The Government can surely distinguish between the work which can be carried out by private enterprise and that which must in one way or another be carried out by the State and see that men and women who are denied employment in one sphere shall find it in another. Above all, nobody should be allowed to draw assistance except in return for work; not charity work, but work honourable to himself and profitable to the community.

Sunday Independent, 2 January, 1944

To-day Ireland Needs Another Brian Boru

1944-01-16

One of the things which all Irish children are taught to take pride in is that at the battle of Clontarf the Danes were beaten by the Irish under Brian Boru.

It would be a little more appropriate if they were taught how for the past seventy years we have been trying to fight the Danes in the field of economics and allowed ourselves to be beaten to the ropes.

The story of "The Second Battle of Clontarf" has been told by an Irish economist (Dr. J. P. Beddy) in an admirable pamphlet issued by the Statistical Society of Ireland, and it is one of the ironies of Irish life that though no pamphlet in my time has created such widespread interest, it is almost impossible to obtain a copy. We have no publishing industry to tell our people even the things they most want to know.

The depressing story of the battle begins seventy odd years ago when Denmark had a population of rather less than two millions and we one of close on four millions. To-day Denmark's is 3,706,000, while ours has dropped to 2,968,000. Portion of Denmark's increase is represented by her acquisition of South Jutland but apart altogether from that, the picture that Dr. Beddy presents is one of steady increase against steady decline.

Electric Light In Houses

In 1870 we had over three million people on the land against the Danish 1,341,000. To-day they have 1,407,000 people on the land, while we have less than two million, and even of these a great number exist in a state bordering on pauperism. Though their rural population is considerably denser than ours, compared with ours they live in affluence, "In Denmark there is a telephone to every 10 or 11 persons; in Eire, not quite one to every hundred." "Unlike Eire, in nearly all rural homes there is electric light; in many there is central heating, bathroom and telephone."

There are 2 1/4 times more motor cars than in Ireland. Their industries produce two hundred and nineteen million pounds worth of goods and employ close on half a million people. Ours produce eighty-one million pounds worth and give employment only to a little over a hundred and fifty thousand people. Yet their country is only 62.3 per cent, the size of Eire!

What is the reason for our phenomenal inferiority? Dr Beddy's own views are expressed in a comment on one of his own tables, which shows that, in 1871, while we had 21.4 of our cultivated land set in cereals and root crops, Denmark had 47.9, but that by 1938, our figure had dropped to 13.5, while Denmark's had risen to 60.4. Not that Denmark had any illusions about economic self sufficiency. She grew her cereals, not for export, but for animal fodder. In other words, Denmark adopted a system of animal husbandry based upon tillage"; Ireland, "a system of animal husbandry based upon grass." which resulted in "less employment, less activity on the land, fewer farm buildings, and less farming capital."

Co. Cork Comparisons

In a number of farms in North Cork the wages bill averaged rather more than £2 10/- per acre; in West Cork more than £4 10/-; but in Denmark wages alone cost £13 per acre. Other expenses were proportionately higher than in Ireland, yet, on the other hand, while the receipts from the North Cork farms averaged only about £5 per acre, and the West Cork farms £9, Denmark took in an average of £27 10/- per acre, giving the farmer himself twice the remuneration of the West Cork farmer, and more than four times that of the North Cork farmer.

This is where Danish industry comes in, for, while North Cork spent only £1 and West Cork £1 14/- on machinery, the Danish farmer spent nearly £3, and about this demand for machinery and farm buildings, Danish industry, with no aid from tariffs, has built up a substantial trade.

Obviously, this isn't only a question of one system of agriculture against another.

The Danish farmer gets thirteen and a half tons of sugar beet to the acre while the Irish farmer only gets nine and three-quarters.

I notice, too, that whereas only a little over twenty per cent, of our agricultural population is employed by farmers, in Denmark almost 45 p.c. are so employed, and "a considerable number of these are the sons and daughters of neighbouring farmers, whose object in accepting employment is to gain wider experience." This means that in Denmark farming is regarded less as a family concern and more as a business, and the farmer, instead of putting his money into Ruritanian Railways, has to put it into machinery and stock.

But, to me, the really significant figures are these. Ireland has 141 businesses that sell paper, stationery and books, but Denmark has 2,430.

Here we are back at the thing we are always trying to escape. The damage begins in our educational system, which turns out boys and girls with no cultural background but Brian Boru, and it spreads in widening circles till it reaches those first damning figures which paint for us the picture of a whole nation in decay.

Sunday Independent, 16 January, 1944

Making Our Countryside Fit To Live In

1944-01-23

The lady who won the “Sunday Independent” prize of one guinea for her views on The Ideal Cottage seems to me to have displayed more sense for that modest sum than most of our legislators for their £480 per annum.

She put her finger unerringly on one of the main evils of rural life in Ireland.

It was an evil that was very much before my mind when writing of Dr. Beddy’s statistical comparison of Ireland and Denmark. He wrote, you may remember, that in Denmark “unlike Eire, in nearly all rural homes there is electric light; in many there is central heating, bathroom and telephone.” Behind this contrast there is another contrast which the prizewinner was clever enough to spot. In demanding the same amenities for her own home, she said:

“It may be argued that the cost of a water and lighting system for isolated homesteads would be prohibitive, but is there any necessity, in most cases, for building lone houses in inaccessible places?”

And the answer, of course, is that there isn’t. These things are possible in Denmark largely because the people are prepared to come to them. In other words, the Danish countryside groups itself naturally into villages and hamlets, while, with each generation, the Irish countryside tends to become ever more straggling and disorderly, with the result that services are bad or non-existent and that people leave the country for the town.

“Famine Relief” Roads

“The reasons for this are largely historical. It wasn’t until after the Battle of the Boyne that the greater part of the country was opened up, and not till the eighteenth century that certain portions, principally along the navigable rivers, were properly laid out. But even there the oldest village is hardly more than two hundred years old, while its English counterpart is probably nine hundred.

As anyone who knows the country well must have observed, many roads are entirely unnecessary. A number were built as famine relief, with the publicly announced intention of being no benefit to the community. But, benefit or not, houses have sprung up along them, and the process has continued with the building of labourers’ cottages and other houses to which the State or local bodies have contributed, so that the villages which did exist—usually wretched hamlets strung out along either side of the road—have never developed. That is another thing which the traveller can easily observe for himself.

On the Continent he need rarely travel more than four or five miles before coming to a cafe or inn where the local farmers drop in for a drink or a cup of coffee, and where he can spend the night. In Ireland he may have to travel four or five times the distance, even along main roads and in the most prosperous parts of the country. The villages simply do not exist. The people of the parish see one another on Sundays at Mass, and that is all.

They live in splendid isolation, without the most ordinary conveniences of the city dweller. The children have to walk miles to school in every weather. There is no telephone within miles; probably no bus, no doctor, no library, no parish hall—nothing to make life tolerable for them.

As against this view I have been reading a description of the joys of Connemara in winter, when, drawing closer to the fire, the people listen to the local story teller and are wafted away on visions of the King of Ireland’s Son. I know that life; it has its own beauty and dignity, but the obstinate statistical fact remains that the inhabitants of Connemara are deserting the joys of life there for the horrors of electricity, gas and water elsewhere, and I haven’t the least doubt that they will continue to do so till these things are inflicted on them in their own homes.

If Money Is To Be Spent—

The Government have threatened to introduce a scheme of rural electrification, and that, whatever it may be like, is a step in the right direction, but they will be making one of the gravest mistakes of their term of office if they attempt to divorce electricity from all the other public services which people of the rural areas need and which they simply must have.

If money is to be spent on the development of the Irish countryside, the first claim should be on laying out the countryside in such a way that the people can take advantage not only of electricity but of cheap and efficient transport, of water, medical attention, schools, libraries, and entertainment.

The first thing to do with our countryside is to make it possible for people to live in it.

The joys of the Robinson Crusoe existence have been slightly overdone.

Sunday Independent, 23 January, 1944

Buildings That Show That Something Is Wrong

1944-02-06

It is foolish to administer high-hat advice, rebuke, knowledge, admonition, and all the rest of it to people in Ireland without, as I have stated previously, reference to the relativities. That's a big word, but means a lot. We are a hundred years behind the times in a hundred ways. Possibly time will prove that in some of our lags-behind we are "ahead," since so many modern progresses are being found out as a fraud these days. But there are a hundred reasons, too, for our late start. To say, therefore, that we cannot be expected to come abreast of the world in a few strides is simple truth. But must we remain for ever in a kind of European back-garden?

Why are we such an untidy, twilight-thinking, your-father-before-you-put-up-with-it-and-he-was-a-better-man-than-you'll-ever-be sort of folk? It isn't the countryside, the vil-lages and the small towns that I am now attacking, but Dublin and the rest of the cities

I thought of it intensively the other day when I went to pay my bill at a semi-Government office up many flights of bare-board stairs. It was an old converted house, evidently of the great Georgian architect days.

Every room, lettered or sign-posted with the name of the business conducted in it, had from door to door the suggestion of decay, almost the smell of it.

A Mockery Of Light

Windows once of an individual design gave a mockery of light on every landing. Wind and rain had been patterning soot and streak over the panes, it must be for unswept years. Evidently the variety of room-holders, each apparently representing a reputable organization, had no care for the communal staircase. If the climbing public now and then broke a neck on it, no matter so long as it was on the descent and one's bill had already been paid.

By what right of economics or aesthetics are a group of otherwise reputable organisations justified in occupying a building through which progress for their members or clients is a throw-back to the stone age—with apologies to the stone age men! And what is the Union of Window Cleaners doing about it? If I were a member of that trade I would make a census of the multitude of unsocial and dirty-windowed buildings occupied thus. A polite reminder, followed by a firm offer for the contract, should then convert some of those dirty window tolerators into decent citizens.

Kills Initiative

The fact that the thing has been endured so long is evidently part of the 'twas-good-enough-for-your-father doctrine which terrorises so many of us out of initiative in Ireland. The proofs of this are not confined to office-tenements. Look at the average post office—dust and must, and stamp-selvage on the floor and counter! Enough to put an honest soul off writing a letter or taking that train-journey at all.

In America—all the Americas—in France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, England, they were foolish enough to believe that a railway station or post office ought to aim at being a decorative credit to the town as well as an inviting place for the passer-by to visit, an incentive even to buy another stamp or see the world. Why, the booking-clerk has been known to set a vase of flowers on his ticket ledge! Here in Ireland if a "business" man identified himself with such a "sissy" gesture, what a primeval mist of ridicule would gather round his head! Though all the while, it is a case of "God help our little heads" for clinging to such absurd and infantile prejudices.

Anyhow, the appalling condition of many office buildings in Dublin does not point to national industry and progress. Why should they be left thus? They are crying out for an immediate clean-up.

Sunday Independent, 6 February 1944

Art And “Gas”

1944-02-20

When my friend said to me, “Let us go and see the pictures on Sunday. There will be very few there,” it sounded like one of his peculiar forms of a joke. I did not answer him. “What about it?” said he, following up.

“What are you talking about?” said I, rather sharply. “There will be very few there?”

He began to laugh. “You have no imagination.” he went on mockingly. “Is there only one sort of pictures in the world? Did you never hear of the Art Gallery?”

“Oh,” said I, recovering and accepting defeat.

At any rate, we did go to the picture gallery that next Sunday, as pleasant a place for a short or a long visit on an afternoon as there is, of its kind, in the world. We were there for just an hour, for the gallery closes early on the Sabbath. It was long enough, however, for a quiet, un-critical amble round and a look at some of the fine paintings and sculptures. During that hour we encountered all told, seven men, four women and three little children.

“I suppose,” said I coming out, “it’s the gas that keeps people away at this of the day. They’re all at home after their dinner now.”

“It surely must be,” said my friend.

Missed Their Midday Meal?

We took the turn that minute into one of the main streets where are the big Picture Houses of the more popular kind. And, lo and behold, a queue of three hundred “starving” people already trailing along the pavement, prepared to forego the coal gas and the meal and all the rest of it for that bit of “gas” they were going to get now in the shade of the celluloid tree! We’re a “gas” people all right, as the Dubliners say.

We collect masterpieces, build a delightful gallery to show them at their best, and then, en masse, we ignore them. When are we going to have a sense of proportion and learn to enjoy the things we pay for?

“Enjoy the things we pay, for? Who paid for them?” says indignant but uninformed citizen. You paid for them yourself, citizen, out of your rates and taxes. “I paid for picture galleries! Not likely!” Sorry, citizen, but you must consult the national and corporation estimates for the details.

The picture galleries, museums, libraries and schools are all yours. That’s why you are hard up so often after you have paid the rates.

On The Continent

One gets tired of drawing comparisons between ourselves and Denmark and other Continental countries, but what a difference in non-war days in a Continental gallery! There go father, mother, son and daughter, with their lunch bag packed, off for a day to admire and discuss the real pictures. None of your exclusive middle-class folk, but the honest citizen with his family taking in a day at his picture gallery as part of the holiday time. One saw that sight so often in European galleries that one forgot the real democracy of it until one was confronted with the mental attitude so painfully common in Ireland that Art, with the capital letter, is only for the “nice” people, an attitude painfully acquiesced in too often by other people who seem to admit that they are not so “nice,” the whole thing a piece of small town snobbery that ought to have died in convulsions a hundred years ago.

Signs Of Change

Thank goodness, it should begin to die soon now, for Ireland, slowly but surely, is opening its eyes to different values. The development of local picture galleries in Cork, Limerick and some other places out of some forward-looking citizens' initiative is as good a sign as any we have had for many a day. These people will soon realize that these galleries are their own property in the best sense of the word, and the world and his wife and child will admire the beauties of them as in every other country that has emancipated itself from the old grandee decay.

Sunday Independent, 20 February, 1944

History Is Damned By Henry Ford, But ...

1944-02-27

One of Mr. Henry Ford's best known sayings is to the effect that history is bunk. Our Irish reputation as an island of saints and scholars is so ancient as to belong exclusively to what he thus roundly damns. If Mr. Ford were an Irish citizen of to-day, and happened to be asked his opinion on the fact that in so many of our secondary schools great importance is attached to Greek and Latin, he would without doubt express himself with similar pungency. And it appears that he would get quite a big number of Irishmen to agree with him!

Even without his assistance some of them are constantly asking, sometimes in public and very often in private, why so many of our ablest boys should spend years of their lives in the study of "this useless stuff." What, good is Greek, anyway? It may have been all right in the dark ages, when they used dead languages. In our go-ahead world, where the thing to do is to start earning your living as soon as possible and to earn all you can while you are able, it is surely a sheer waste of time. What is more, it is an injustice, because obviously only the leisured classes can afford to learn it, even though nobody can say it does them any good. Is it not time we did away with all this out-moded folly and set our boys to do sums and learn how to tend machines?

Educational authorities may not always be very wise, but it is unlikely that they would persist so long in such laborious activity if it were quite as purposeless as all that.

Many people can see no use in things they don't happen to know anything about; there is little use in trying to convey to a man who for years has drunk nothing but porter the fine points of a Burgundy vintage.

The value of Greek and Latin is more than a mere matter of taste, but it can only be communicated to those who have some sense of the meaning and importance of civilisation.

Keys To Culture

Our boys learn these dead languages because without a fairly widespread knowledge of them European civilisation would find it difficult to continue, even might cease to exist. Greek and Latin are the keys to the high tradition of Christian culture. That is why, until Christendom began to surrender itself to material ends and thus to destroy itself, all the peoples of Europe thirsted for knowledge of them; why Alfred the Great, a half-barbarian soldier, set himself to translate Boethius, and why Dr. Johnson, a thousand years later, said: "Sir, Greek is like fresh air: we get as much of it as we can."

To abolish Greek and Latin would be the same as cutting off the bough of the tree on which we are sitting. It would mean that in a very short time we should fall into barbarism.

Now, barbarism may be quite easy to read about; it is not nearly so pleasant to experience, even if the barbarians have cars made by Mr. Ford.

An even more important reason for maintaining the study of Greek and Latin is that they are the languages of the Christian faith. The Church's liturgy is daily celebrated in Latin all over the world, and must continue to be so celebrated as long as Rome remains. The theology and philosophy of the Church are imparted to students in a Latin which is itself adapted from Greek originals. Without the knowledge of Greek and Latin the tradition of the Church would become impaired, and Christendom would sink to the level of Abyssinia.

Science

Through the Church, too, in spite of Mr. Wells and others, and through the Church's Greek and Latin heritage, the modern world has acquired the science of which it is so proud, and of which Mr. Ford's motor car is a recent product.

The Greeks were the first scientists, and science is not made up of the brainwaves of illiterate inventors, but is a continuous and living tradition of specialised knowledge.

They were the first practitioners, as well as theorists of scientific medicine, and even to-day medicine has something to learn from Hippocrates, whose motto was: "Where there is love of the art, there is also love of humanity."

The country whose schools cease to pursue the knowledge of Greek and Latin may perhaps subsist for a time on bits and scraps begged from more fortunate countries, but it will be spiritually barren and physically impoverished.

Sunday Independent, 7 February, 1944

One's Second Thoughts Are Best!

1944-03-05

When one has read the latest war reports and then reflects imaginatively for a moment, it seems no longer worth while to grow parochially emphatic about anything. What is it but fiddling while the world burns about one? But the mind is a miracle, and no matter what the odds, our thoughts and indignations turn inwards and local again and triumph over the external pressure. So the Swiss in the hub of the flaming wheel of Europe organise their business conferences, art exhibitions, musical festivals, and plan new schemes for the days when their country will be the playground of Europe once more. It is the same with Portugal, whose propaganda bulletin still regularly covers the world even at long time-lags of delayed postal transport. In it are recorded the multiplications of internal effort in defiance of all the peripheral stresses. Sweden and Turkey likewise, in spite even of the latter's more elemental war of the earthquakes, with their host of casualties and no shot fired.

Then why not Ireland? And a challenge to start the local argument is here at once in that protest at a Co. Cork meeting the other day against a poster depicting a group of four handsome women of the West, ignoring the Paris fashions and comely in every way in their native and natural dress—only, alas, in their bare feet! “A perpetuation of the stage Irishman,” said the critic. His reasoning is false. The women did not want shoes for the particular work and weather in which they were engaged. They stand in the poster, as near as good colour printing can render them, realistically true to life. The stage Irishman was, and is, a diametrically opposite type, unrealistically distorted to please a foreign concept of us.

All of which is another woeful example of the Irish vice of criticism from one's first thoughts without the discreet re-examination of the secondaries in which the logic lies.

Too many Irish public arguments arise out of that. First, undigested thoughts are literally the curse of the country. In the particular instance of the Irish poster opinions will differ as to its general suitability for foreign display, but the question of “stage Irish” cannot enter into it intrinsically.

Irish Hotels

From travel posters to hotels is an easy debating step. And here, too, the conflicting opinions, many of them expressed in the undigested state, keep up a constant argument. There are very many excellent small and moderately large hotels in Ireland—the hotel in the big European or American sense is practically unknown. But hundreds of critics apply to the lesser Irish hotels the cyclopean standards of the foreign ones and straightway condemn them, almost as illogically as the case of the poster. That much said, there is still plenty to criticise in very many of the hotels—so-called and otherwise—in Ireland. For one thing, too many people undertake the business without, any preliminary knowledge or training.

Hotel-keeping is as detailed and departmentalised a calling as any, and the haphazard approach to it, as if it were just opening another glorified lodging-house, can lead only to deserved condemnation. That can and does happen every summer.

Well-intentioned but ill-equipped people start their hotel, disappoint their guests by their inefficiency, and the result is the serial abuse of the whole hotel industry. But, of course, the word “hotel” itself is a stumbling block. Every second public-house in rural England, and even in urban areas, calls itself a hotel, though never a guest deliberately sleeps the night there. In Ireland the word “hotel” is as loosely carried sometimes as the signboards that identify it. The first thing needed, then, is an eliminating test to save the uninformed visitor from the second-rate.

Awkward Position

It is easy to talk of tests: to put them into practice is the rub. What is going to happen in a town where the most that can be said of No. 1 on the list, is that it is “the best of a bad lot?” That an effort at definition is long due, however, is certain, and any attempt at classification on a fairly elastic plan to begin with should be given a fair show. It will be preposterous if critics at once raise these first-thought objections.

And, for a final surprising fact about those much-discussed Irish hotels in general. Some seven years ago an analysis revealed the fact that the percentage of hotels, small and large, in Ireland with hot and cold running water installed was higher than the percentage in Britain. So whatever the temptation, one’s second thoughts are best.

Sunday Independent, 3 March, 1944

Agonies Of Practice Recipe For Champions

1944-03-12

It is only an argument among the devotees, but perhaps it is significant for all of us. The man in the street or the field is not much interested in it, for the moment, at any rate, but discussions have a habit of getting suddenly and unexpectedly fluid in Ireland and we are all shouting as experts before we realise what we are talking about.

In that sense this argument is nationally typical, like the status of every local champion—"He'd beat the world, if he got the chance," when, of course, he hasn't the remotest chance of even meeting the world, to say nothing of "beating" it. That's the way with us—we are given to superlatives; we don't believe them but they are such a constant manner of speaking that we give in to the mass suggestion of their repeated use.

Plenty Of Material?

Anyhow, the particular argument in this case is about Grand Opera and Irish singers and musicians in the orchestra. An impasse has arisen in Dublin out of Radio Eireann's inability further to release their orchestra for the Grand Opera needs of the Dublin theatres. Whereupon up rise voices saying, "We have plenty of material for other first-class Symphony Orchestras in Dublin." And other voices join in the chorus with, "Look at all our neglected young singers! There are the makings of prima donnas at every feis if only we gave them the right help and encouragement!"

All of which is just bunkum. A prima donna or a maestro is rare even in the countries of populations ten times as large as Ireland. And once found in embryo, the period of training and probation before they appear before the great public is such as we never could endure here so long as we cherish the myth of being able to "beat" the world on the minimum of training and lie back secure in that inferiority-complex futile boast.

Consider the finished ballet dancer—it looks so easy. Surely there are lots of feis dancers with just that graceful liteness that would "beat the world" if they took the trouble to become ballet dancers? Not a bit of it!

Ballet dancing is for ten or more years of training the most exacting, long-houred, almost intolerable process known.

It needs a bovine patience to achieve the first controls.

Remote From Reality

Those who gaily and confidently walk on in their big part after a couple of casual rehearsals and then accept the good-natured paralysis of the praise about "beating" the world, are many miles remote from the reality.

That is the mentality that lives in the fairyland of Ireland having the best of everything in the world—the best horses, the best cattle, the best butter, the best athletes, the best soldiers (haven't we won battles for all the other nations!), the best land, the best everything, in fact. That mentality is a menace to the nation.

Until we learn we cannot beat or compare with the champions of other nations without agonies of practice, whether it be as farmers, butter-makers, opera singers, golfers or lawn tennis players, we are likely to remain a small nation in every sense of the word. Champions are not to be had merely by saying they are on every farm, at every feis.

Who Is To Blame?

Who is to blame for our casual approach to so many difficult subjects? The old answer is that we were so long a people under false tutelage that we would have perished had we not

whistled to keep up our spirits. But if we go on whistling in the altered times of to-day we'll only whistle ourselves down the wind of our own out-of-date vanity. Nations are not made great by mere well-wishing. Our young people should get some compulsory lessons on the value of honest hard work.

Sunday Independent, 12 March, 1944

Before We Can Resume Our March We Must

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1944-03-19

There is a saying, which has been so much used as to have reached the rank of a near-proverb, that Irish history is something for Irishmen to forget and for Englishmen to remember. It is mostly used of course, by benevolent Englishmen, who themselves have not the least intention of doing any remembering but who would rather like us to forget. Though it sounds plausible at first hearing, it is really a very silly saying: the sort of proposition that must have been first uttered in a particularly oozy after-dinner oration.

The silliness cuts both ways, for it is just as irrational to expect another people to devote much attention to our past experiences as it is to ask us to pay them none at all. Modern academic historians, who know more about documents than about how things really happen, have spent at least a generation trying to persuade people that history is nothing but the blind groping of inarticulate masses for food, clothing and shelter.

History And The Vote

The old description of history as past politics is both truer and healthier.

I use the word “healthier” advisedly, because not nearly enough emphasis is usually laid on the very serious dangers that attend on ignorance in this subject more than in all others.

History, is an indispensable aid to our understanding of ourselves, and in real life if we do not understand ourselves we risk our very existence. All our actions, and all our prospects of success in any of them, are conditioned by the past—and not merely by our pasts as individuals, but by the actions, ideas, follies, crimes, and heroisms of those who have gone before us. “If statesmen knew more history.” says Canon Ernest Dimnet, “they would make fewer mistakes.”

In these democratic days, when everyone has a vote, and with it a great responsibility for his own and his country’s destiny, it is desirable, indeed necessary, that all citizens should know as much history as they can be got to learn. Last year I came across a sad case of dangerous ignorance in a voter who, on seeing a book about the war of 1914-18 expressed her surprise at discovering that there had been a war then, too.

When we discuss the merits of our system of government, it would be useful to bear in mind that there are large numbers of such voters.

Forgetting Our Mythology

Unfortunately, very many of our young people learn most of what they know about history from the cinema, and remember best the kind of American picture which, was shown some time ago about the First Crusade. The curse of examinations has done more evil in this respect to our young people than in almost any other. They are compelled to learn strings of dates from dull text-books, which leave out everything important or interesting, or else they are given large doses of mythology dressed to look like history, such as an account I have seen, in a book intended for schools, of the Black and Tan period, which managed not to mention Michael Collins.

We have had far too much history in Ireland of the kind which teaches small boys that Wolfe Tone’s grave is holier than St Patrick’s and that John Mitchel spoke with the voice of God. Possibly, when the benevolent Englishman said we should forget our history, he really meant that we should forget our mythology. If so, he was altogether right.

Not A New People

One of the forces which gave its early impetus to the Sinn Féin movement was the new outlook on the history of Gaelic Ireland which was opened up by the work of Dr Eoin MacNeill. For the first time it became possible to get a true picture of the Ireland which St. Patrick made Christian and which resisted Viking, Norman, Elizabethan and Cromwellian till it went down at last before William of Orange.

This new vision of the truth about ourselves was an inspiration to the movement which set us free.

Unfortunately, it got mixed up in the end with propaganda, and when that happened the inspiration stopped. We needed to have the vision extended to be told the truth about our recent as well as about our ancient history; but we never were. Yet our recent history, from King William down, matters enormously.

It is not true that we are a new people, invented out of nothing by Wolfe Tone or Daniel O'Connell or any leader of nearer date. We know in our bones that we are as old as any people in Europe, and it is history that has made us what we are. Before we can resume our march we must learn more about ourselves.

Sunday Independent, 19 March, 1944

Turf Is Bad and Dear: Why Not Controller?

1944-03-26

Many citizens must have been very much surprised to discover from the report of the debate on the estimates for the Department of Supplies that, not alone are they paying a very high price for turf per ton to the merchants, but that a sum of £450,000 has to be paid from taxation—that is, from the people's money—in order to make it available, even at that price.

During the debate the Minister stated that the total cost of all turf handled by Fuel Importers, Ltd., produced in all parts of the country and sold out of dumps in Dublin, is 75/7 per ton. This means, at the price to the consumer of 64/- a ton, a loss to the taxpayer on every ton of turf sold in the city of 11/7. According to Mr. Lemass, however, the loss in the non-turf areas as a whole is 28/10 per ton. The Minister made it quite clear that this is an altogether uneconomic cost.

It has no relation at all to the cost of turf as normally produced by private enterprise and sold in the open market.

Clear Without Cheer

This statement may be enlightening to the intelligence; it is not very cheering to the feelings of the average householder, whose fuel bill now runs to anything in the region of £30 to £100 a year. The reasons for this extraordinary rise are again bleakly intelligible.

Merchants buy their turf from Fuel Importers, Ltd., a joint body set up since the emergency began. This body, since its inception, has handled well over a million tons of turf. It gets its supplies only to a limited extent from the Turf Development Board or from private producers. By far the greatest proportion of turf consumed in Dublin is produced under special emergency schemes by the County Councils. Much of it comes from remote districts in Donegal, Galway and Mayo.

Distance involves repeated handling and constant exposure to the effects of carelessness, both of which factors severely affect the price.

As Mr. Lemass insisted during the debate, turf is not coal and cannot be treated as such without great loss.

In Kerry, turf production during the three years, 1941, 1942, and 1943, totalled 131,737 tons, of which, we are told 25,779 tons are described as unsaleable. In Longford the County Council's scheme over three years has been run at a loss of only £250 to date, it is reported. But what puzzles the consumers, who pay dearly for their turf, is why should there be any loss on turf production? Didn't the men of the bogs always sell their turf at a profit?

Legitimate Doubts

Consumers will readily understand that they must take what they can get in an emergency, and that, bad as things are, they would be worse if we had no turf. So much admitted, however, certain legitimate doubts inevitably arise.

It was quite right in the first year of the emergency to use whatever means were then available. But this is 1944 and surely more might have been done in three years to eliminate unnecessary cost. Many fantastic mistakes were made at the beginning. Need they have continued to be made?

Mr. Lemass stated that the cost of distributing turf could be substantially reduced if the coal merchants were eliminated, but that this could not be done without a great deal of trouble. On the other hand, he said that as far as County Council turf is concerned, his Department merely repays the cost of production as certified by the Local Government Department. Here are surely two great weaknesses in the present arrangement. Could both

not be eliminated, at least to some extent, by the appointment of a Fuel Controller with wide powers?

Blessings Could Be Cheaper?

Deputy Byrne, junr., said in the course of the debate that the persons responsible for the supply of turf to Dublin have succeeded in doing a thing proverbially impossible. They have found a means of producing smoke without fire.

Every consumer is well aware that much of the turf supplied is exceedingly bad.

It is doubtful if any consumer has ever been able to buy a ton of what would be considered good turf by experts. Much of the trouble is undoubtedly due, not to exposure to wet after saving, but to the fact that the turf sold has never been properly dried at all. Again, an immense proportion of the turf is not turf in the proper sense of the word. It is either the top layer of the bog, mostly half decayed vegetable matter, or it is cut from bogs containing an extraordinary amount of mineral matter which will not burn.

Mere inspection of turf in dumps will not cure these defects. They can only be remedied by intelligent selection of the bogs in which turf is to be cut.

There is no use telling people in urgent need of fuel that they can complain if they are not satisfied. Great as our blessings may be, we have reason to believe that they could be greater—and a good deal cheaper.

Sunday Independent, 26 March, 1944

Education Is Left At The Post

1944-04-16

It was a lively Easter among the teachers. They had their conferences in Ireland and England, and spoke with voices of alternating thunder and tact. Killarney, where the Irish National teachers met, became for days a power-house of hard thinking and happy living. There was philosophy in that great muster of National teachers when they chose that nest of beauty for their emphatic arguments.

Teachers always deserve a hearing on the things in which they are expert. Better still, they see that they get that hearing now in Ireland after an eternity of silence as the underdogs of the educational world, such as it existed up to thirty or so years ago in this country.

And what had they to say at Killarney? A few of their declarations will stand for the pungent vivacity of many. "There is," said one speaker, "more attention paid to the care and culture of greyhounds than to the rising young in Ireland in many parts." A hit—a palpable hit—as anyone can testify who has had his shins barked on the way to catch a bus on one of the dog-routes in Dublin on a racing night. Several veterans of the bus war carry a scar gained in the push-as-push-can encounters when they mildly tried to hold their place in the crush for the home-going bus that, unfortunately for them, passed the place of the white lights and the hectic hounds.

Left At The Post!

Analysis of the sport we may leave to the full and fidgeting crowds round the tracks as they watch the brief, bewildering flight of the dogs make away with their bets. The turnover in a night could, one has heard, rebuild a couple of schools. The teachers are right—the dogs get away with it. Education is left at the post.

"Ah, but the dogs are an industry." says the case for the defence. Quite true!

And a school with a leaking roof and a cracked-brick chimney is still a luxury in a hundred places. We are all right only for that missing sense of proportion in our make-up.

English schoolmasters picked their venue healthily, too, this Easter. A host of their delegates met at Blackpool, comparatively remote still from the wars, and wide and windy beside the big sea. The films for children, the red-lips-in-the-sunset of the young painted ladies "just let loose from school," the decay of home control—here, approximately, was the same catalogue of protestations as in Ireland.

Bearings Lost

With the coming of freedom and the toleration of so many kinds of folly on the ground that, really, you must not check natural development but trust that all is evolving towards a new good, we have lost our bearings.

The records of half-illiterate children flocking to adult and largely deliquescent pictures four times a week ensures a half-baked generation.

If the teachers are to be believed, we already have that generation both here and there.

"But, after all this indignation, what's the remedy?" someone reasonably will ask. It is a fair question, since indignation can grow into as big a folly and futility as the alleged cause of it.

There is no remedy so long as we are in the earthquake phase of civilisation as it at present shakes, at least no mass-remedy.

Local salvation lies in every man attempting to think for himself and to duck under from the pelting of impostures that abound in every country under the guise of cure-alls for some remotely-urgent condition.

If an analysis were made of the utter waste of days, months, even years, in the lives of millions driven into publicised movements that have fizzled into nothing but farce and ruin in the Europe of our time, the total figures would be so astronomical that no one would believe them. This, then, is the immediate treatment—clear, meditated and individual thinking. But there is little sign of it in our highly sloganned schemes.

Sunday Independent, 16 April, 1944

“Let Us Give A Hand To The Farmers,”

1944-04-23

When the poet wrote, “Whatever is, is best,” he surely meant to say, “Whatever is—make the best of it!” That’s the motto for to-day, anyhow, for now, above all other times, we must cheer up in the face of difficulty. The satirist, with full scope for his flail other weeks, hasn’t the same sure grip when the transport goes dead around him. In other words, you can’t preach a sermon to a man who has to wait three days for a train and, even then, may not catch it! Nor, indeed, can you expect to be listened to very attentively by the dweller in his cottage preoccupied with the problem of the rationed candle.

War is a queer business, touching so many simple and intimate aspects of life with its dark contagion. Repercussions is the grandiose word sometimes used to define these side-effects of it.

Light In Darkness

A memorable “repercussion” out of the early days of the present war came from a conversation in which a compartmentful of us shared in a cross-country night train through England. The various effects of the black-out on our varied occupations were being summarised and dissected in the friendly chance-acquaintance way that war, in its first stages before mass-suspicion intervenes, gives rise to. At last the man in the corner, a Yorkshire farmhand and, obviously, a warm-handed and warm-hearted son of the soil, put his case in a voice that seemed to become part of the mild air of the night. It troubled him how he would get on when, in lambing time, one of the sheep out on the moors dropping her young in the dark would need attention. “How will I be able to carry on,” said he with a genuine note of anxiety, “if I can’t have any light to look after her in the field?”

A small repercussion, but surely a profound one, giving light in the darkness both to the intelligence and the fidelity of an otherwise indistinguishable shepherd of the obscure hills.

And a subtle reminder to the too-urbanised among us of that vital farmers’ world of which town-dwellers can be so opaquely ignorant not to say intolerant even.

Compliments Now

Which leads on to the nearer-home aspects of the farm and farmer’s valuation in the townsman’s eyes, a radical consideration in a country like ours where almost sixty per cent, of the people derive from and depend on agriculture.

Ministers, while warning the working community on the land, have recently not failed to pass them many compliments as well. They are entitled to the compliments, however much, in detail, there is still to find fault with. And, surely, there is, if we are to judge by the protesting voices:—

“Farmers are too conservative in their outlook, their view of the world is too local, they can’t identify themselves with the economic norm of the nation.” says one. “Oh, farmers,” says another, “they’re always complaining. If it isn’t the fertilisers, it’s the weather, or the inspectors, or the latest form to be filled in.” “Poor farmers!” says a third. “And, tell me, from what class are the people in the higher professions largely drawn? Who pays for the expensive education of those doctors, solicitors and others in the making? Poor farmers—how are you!”

Those Complaints!

Well, often, they are too conservative, too local in their outlook. But time and circumstance are rapidly breaking down that attitude, which was the product in large part of

an exaggerated caution bred by a crazy history of land legislation which took the spirit of enterprise out of generations of farmers: nothing more, really, now, than a hang-over that soon must wither away. And they are always complaining. But that's a habit with farmers everywhere, a psychological diathesis induced by a calling that is too often at the mercy of external circumstance, wind and weather.

It is easy for your satisfied merchant of the towns, with his store well-built and buttressed by years of solid selling, to complain of the too complaining farmer. Change callings for a few years and it will still be the same voices, grievances, and the rest of the seesaw that is the game of life.

"Ah but the farmers are cute though! They know how to watch the main chance all the time." says fourth and final critic, who surely, will not deny the need for cuteness in this age and nation in which the rackets in town and country keep every alert man's eyes skinned for the next move by which he is going to be "done."

So, after all, till the expresses run again, let us give a hand to the farmers where we can. They'll need it. especially at harvest time.

Sunday Independent, 23 April, 1944

Is A Dublin Man More English Than Clareman?

1944-04-30

Some years ago a book appeared with an engaging title: *The English—Are They Human?* It is hardly necessary for us to ask that question about ourselves; observers are generally inclined to agree that we are, in fact, all too human. The really important question for us Irish, the question that keeps on, and will keep on coming back at us for long ages yet, is rather this: The Irish—Are they English? It carries with it some others, of which the principal is, perhaps, this: If we are not English, then what on earth are we? Perhaps the subject is best attacked from this second angle. There is a good deal of painful evidence that we are just a peculiar kind of English. We are seldom allowed to forget that the English language is what we normally speak, and some high authorities seem to vary between just wishing we didn't and believing that because we do we are therefore not Irish. We read English books and papers, we go to English shows, and in our moments of relaxation we even sing "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" about one another. And we have probably more money invested in England than at home.

Only Superficial

In spite of all these formidable facts it remains the truth that we are no more English now than ever we were.

The resemblances are all strikingly superficial: the differences go deep down. To begin with, there is the most important difference of all—religion. The Irish, as has been pointed out before now, even if deficient in morals, are a notoriously religious people. The English are nowadays among the least religious peoples in the world; but they are so painfully imbued with the moral sense that the world stands amazed by them.

Irish Catholicism is more than a part of the Church Universal; it is something so peculiarly and strangely Irish that it marks the race with a special stamp wherever it goes. There is a well-known story about an Australian parish priest who wished to raise money to build a church dedicated to St. Athanasius, and was baulked when his congregation inquired what had St. Athanasius ever done for Ireland.

Another far-reaching difference arises from the fact that the Irish are not race or colour conscious. This seems at first to contradict their habit of sticking together abroad; yet it is true that they can settle anywhere and live on good terms with any people, and indeed acquire in a curious way a second nationality while never entirely losing the original one. So, too, they can be friends at home or abroad with people of all races and all colours, whereas the colour-consciousness and natural exclusiveness of the English are among their chief characteristics.

The Silent English!

Perhaps a third big difference goes along with these two: the Irish are talkative and expansive, the English silent and secretive. Nothing is more painful to the typical Irishman than the silence of the English. He himself wears his heart on his sleeve and is always ready to discuss his inmost thoughts and feelings; to the normal Englishman this would be the last indecency, and he is apt to judge others in a kind of inverse ratio to their ability to explain themselves.

These are only a few of the more salient differences, which between them constitute a vast, gulf. Can anyone really believe that such a gulf is capable of being bridged by a common language alone? In any case, the differences in language, even within the wide

bounds of English, are themselves enormous, and most unlikely to grow less. There is, perhaps, a slight danger that if the Irishman ceases to be predominantly a countryman he may learn, through the town, more English ways than will be good for him.

But does anyone think that a Dublin man is more English than a Clareman?

A Real Danger

Ireland needs indeed to foster and spread the Irish language; but this is not for fear, of the bogey of becoming English, but because the Irish language is a rich and fruitful component of the Irish nature. We have no real need to worry, like the foolish girl in the fairy-tale, over such unlikely things as the danger that we shall wake up one morning and find that we have become English overnight. The danger that we shall suddenly become Russians or Swedes is just about as serious.

What we do need to worry about is the danger of ignorance: that a time may come when we shall forget utterly our own past as a people, and become, not English, but a featureless Irish mob.

Sunday Independent, 30 April, 1944

Partition—The People Are Bewildered

1944-05-07

The last few weeks have produced rather a spate of pronouncements on the Partition question, including an article in the London *Spectator* from Viscount Castlereagh, an M.P. who bears a name familiar to readers of Irish history. Perhaps the show-pieces among these pronouncements was a speech by Mr. MacEntee, followed by a long and verbose epistle to the newspapers.

It is often believed that the Irish people are either sunk in hopeless apathy on this question or else have their heads lost in a cloud of intransigent idealism. Neither belief is at all true.

The fact is that the people, now as always, are passionately interested in the problem of Ireland's unity.

Their interest mainly springs not from mysticism or from any kind of insular geopolitics, but from the plain and simple truth that Partition has inflicted and is inflicting a monstrous injustice on the large minority of nationalists who have been quite artificially subjected under it to the rule of Belfast. In Tyrone, Fermanagh, Derry City, South Armagh and South Down, that minority is so large that it is a majority, and the electoral machinery has to be rigged in order to keep it under.

Events Not Followed

For the matter of that, there is nothing more chimerical or unreal about Irishmen's desire for national unity than there is about Englishmen's. The English are so keen on it, indeed, that they have incorporated Scotland and Wales, and they would still have held on to Ireland if they could. Irishmen are neither fanatical nor apathetic, but justifiably bewildered and incoherent. Their bewilderment can hardly be lessened by Mr. MacEntee's remarkable line of argument. He counts his vote against the Treaty in 1921 as one of his greatest contributions to the solving of the Partition problem. Surely enough time has now elapsed for everyone, no matter what his record or his past convictions, to see clear on this matter.

In one sense it may be clear, that a vote against the Treaty was a vote against Partition. In the very same sense, however, it was a vote against self-government for the Twenty-Six Counties, with all that has flowed therefrom, including Mr. MacEntee's occupancy of his present position.

If it had been a successful vote, the overwhelming probability is that we should have got Partition anyhow—it was in fact there already—but without anything but Crown Colony government for the rest of Ireland. Mr. MacEntee falls into the hoary fallacy of talking as if the alternative to the Treaty was a Republic for all Ireland. It was nothing of the kind; it was “immediate and terrible war.”

If Mr. De Valera ...

Suppose for a moment that another course, which events since then have shown to have been perfectly feasible, had been taken. Suppose Mr. de Valera had supported, and recommended the Treaty, bringing, as he would have brought, most of his followers with him. If he had, Arthur Griffith might have lived ten years longer, and Michael Collins and Kevin O'Higgins would still be in the prime of life. Does anyone really believe that if these four men had concentrated all their united energies and abilities on the ending of Partition, they could not have ended it in less than ten years?

As it was, O'Higgins alone transformed the British Commonwealth, and by his work in 1926 turned all the other alleged objections to the Treaty into a lot of silly phantoms.

These were four extremely able, strong, and courageous men. There are probably no four men like them working together even in any of the greatest countries of the world to-day. With a united, disciplined people behind them, what could they not have accomplished. It is arguable that not only could they have disposed of Partition, but given Ireland a status and an influence in the world even of power-politics, far beyond her actual physical strength.

A Divided People

The people are bewildered because they are divided and they have been divided ever since the split and the civil war. We shall not see the end of Partition until they are reunited.

It has been proved over and over again that the united strength of Irish nationalism is immense.

The trouble is that this powerful entity is also wayward, hard to discipline, hard to keep on one single line of purpose or policy. We have often been told that an essential pre-requisite to any fresh advance towards unity is the abandonment of force; and this is true. For this purpose physical force is the weapon of a half-wit or a whole lunatic. But a still more essential pre-requisite than a new choice of instrument is the reintegration of those who must wield it. Let us not deceive ourselves. Before anything more can be done to unite all Ireland, Irish nationalism must become once more itself a united force. When that time comes, things will begin to happen. Not a day or an hour sooner.

Sunday Independent, 7 May, 1944

The Next Five Years Will Be Fateful—Or Fatal?

1944-05-14

When one is dealing with such a past-master of political tactics as Mr. de Valera, one must expect nothing better than the rigour of the game. It has been fairly obvious for some little time that since his Government was in a minority in the Dáil he was likely to seek to recover his old strength by exploiting the recent crisis in our external affairs. And, though defeated on a vote in the Dáil on a question on which all sensible men and women would have voted against him, he has decided to rush a General Election.

What is at stake in the forthcoming election is, of course, not the Transport Bill itself. Neither is it Eire's neutrality in the war, though we are almost certain to hear the changes rung on our neutrality, unless we have more honesty this time.

It is whether we shall continue for at least five years more to be governed by the same set of men that has governed us for the past twelve.

National Splits

It has often been remarked that there is a curious analogy between the aftermath of the Sinn Féin split of 1922 and the sequel to the Parnell split of 1891. Both left the country not only divided but bewildered. In the case of the Parnell split, progress did not begin again until the two wings of the Irish Party were reunited under the leadership of John Redmond, the Parnellite leader. In the Sinn Féin case there is the very great difference that the leader, about whose personality the contest centred, himself survived the split and returned after ten years to power. Nevertheless, the effects of the split remain.

The two chief parties still represent the two wings of Sinn Féin, and their division, however natural and unavoidable its continuance, is a very great weakness to the nation. Each, of course, has at times put itself forward as the only possible foundation for government, but neither can claim to be anything like fully representative of the whole people. In fact, however the pendulum may swing to one side or another, they have divided the people almost equally between them. It is often said that they do not differ fundamentally in their policies; yet they continue to denounce and thwart each other, with the result that not only is any new departure in policy out of the question, but that even the old policy, on which they were once united, remains inoperable.

If Unity Came

Let us suppose that the two parties could be brought together, as the two wings of the Irish Party were in 1901. Something like this is in effect the policy of Fine Gael under its new leadership, as I understand it—a National Government composed of the best men of all the parties. No amount of scoffing on Mr. de Valera's part can do away with the fact that such a reunion would do immense good. A National Government would stop the waste of time and energy that is affecting the country. It would secure that the best men available are given the task of governing the country, and allow time and opportunity for the working out of the new policies which the new world calls for.

No one can pretend at present that the best men available are at the helm in all the Departments of State.

How much public time has been spent, during the year that has elapsed since the last general election, in party manoeuvres and party recriminations?

Is it not obvious that even the coming election is being forced on the people, not because of any fundamental differences in policy, but because the effort to keep power in the hands

of one party has prevented politicians from putting the good of the country first?

Would Prevent Wrangling

If the last election had led to the formation of a National Government, as it might well have done, we should have been free from the wrangling that is threatening us with national degeneracy. There are good grounds for the view that the mandate of the electorate a year ago was for the cessation of party strife. It was not decisive enough. The leader of the largest party was able to insist on keeping power in the hands of what was, in effect, as the last week has shown, a minority of the Dáil.

A general election every year is a high enough price to pay for Mr. de Valera's theory of government by a unique party, for which he claims virtues that it clearly does not possess.

The next five years are going to be fateful—perhaps fatal. They will certainly set the pattern of the world for a lifetime. It has been clearly proved that the continuance of the Sinn Féin split will make it impossible for Ireland to face any of her problems with a clear mind and a single will.

Such unity as the war has forced upon us has been real in the intention of the people, but hollow in the practice of the politicians. Nobody can sincerely believe that a clear majority for the present Government is going to make things any better. It will merely perpetuate the same practical disunity under a very thin mask of agreement.

Goodwill and patriotism could remove the obstacles to a real National Government. We have tried division for long enough, and found it barren. Perhaps this election may give our politicians a decisive mandate for a genuine reunion of forces.

Sunday Independent, 14 May, 1944

In Normal Countries, With Normal Politicians....

1944-05-21

It is not to be wondered at that Fianna Fail Ministers should dwell in their election speeches on the fearsome consequences which they allege will follow if they do not get a clear majority.

They could hardly face the people at all if they did not at least pretend to believe in themselves.

Only a very great man indeed can recognise his own limitations, and such a great man is most unlikely to be a politician. On the other hand, it is very dangerous for the common people to take politicians at their face-value. The purpose of an election is, in fact, to enable the common people to take a good look at the politicians, and the voter's duty is the exact opposite of the candidate's. Whereas the latter must of necessity dress himself out as attractively as possible, the former, if he realises the danger of bad government to his country and to himself, should strive to resist all the blandishments of election propaganda, and to see the choice before him in a clear and steady light.

In Most Rabid Form

Mr. de Valera wants a new mandate for a further five years, and has shown some indication of his intention, if and when he gets that mandate, to extend it without asking any further leave.

A new mandate for Mr. de Valera means the continuance of party government in its most rabid form.

Let there be no mistake about it: if Fianna Fail gets its majority, it will do exactly what it likes, and nobody is going to be able to stop it. The party spokesmen justify this proposal by suggesting, rather than openly stating, that, of course, Fianna Fail contains all the best brains and the most patriotic citizens in the country. Probably this is really believed by one of the Ministers. But does anybody else —do even all the other Ministers believe it?

One thing is quite certain: Mr. de Valera does not. He has notoriously never chosen his Ministers for their ability. Dozens of abler men could be found for any of the posts of Ministers. They are in office, not because they have any special qualifications, but because they are Mr. de Valera's henchmen. If he were to retire from politics to-morrow, most of them would disappear from public life like that rare thing in Ireland, winter snow. Every observant citizen is well aware that the only real obstacle in the way of a truly national government, which would at least try to get the right men for the right jobs, is Mr. de Valera himself.

Must Be Sole Master

There, is no reason whatever, apart from Mr. de Valera's obstinate determination to be the sole master, why Fianna Fail should not join with other parties in forming a national government. In normal countries, with normal politicians, such governments have, in fact, been the order of the day since 1940. One would imagine, from the speeches of Mr. de Valera and Mr. Lemass, that coalition or national governments were everywhere and always a ridiculous failure, the uniform laughing-stock of history.

The exact contrary is the fact. Whenever a nation faces difficult times, the natural tendency of its patriotic citizens is to get together.

This very thing has happened here among the common people. It could have happened, indeed, should and would have happened, among the politicians as well, if Mr. de Valera were willing to work with independent, intelligent men, allow them to state their opinions,

and let the judgment of the majority decide. There would be no need whatever for party bargaining or for deals behind closed doors. The country would be quite content to let Mr. de Valera himself pick the best men, so long as he did not keep up the grotesque pretence that they are all in the “Republican” Party which fought the Treaty but did nothing about the Republic when it had won its fight.

Give Best Men Chance

There is nothing at all fanciful or extravagant about the statement that we shall need all our best men during the next five years. It is the bare and simple truth. The end of the last war was one of the most crucial periods in our history. All indications are that the end of this war will be quite as crucial, if not more so. Apart entirely from our external relationships, every one of our State departments will need to be drastically overhauled, reconstructed, given new life, energy, and vision. The mere lavish spending of public money will not be nearly enough. Indeed, the kind of headless, chaotic, uncoordinated spending of which we have had too much in the past might be fatal. It is absurdly easy to pour out money, especially when it is not your own.

Nobody, not even the most hardened supporter of Fianna Fail, believes that it has the monopoly of talent, intelligence, education, or public spirit. Yet that is what its claim for a majority in the new Dáil really amounts to.

At its strongest it has never represented much more than 55 per cent of the people. Why should we perpetuate a system under which the other 45 per cent, are ignored?

It will not do to say the minority are consulted. They are presented with government decisions, which they may criticise but which they can very rarely alter. If they ever look like being strong enough to prevent Mr. Lemass from having his own way—as happened on the Transport Bill—they are almost told they are guilty of treason.

How can any country expect to come through very difficult times with this crazy theory of a uniquely gifted party—especially when everybody knows how far it really is from having the gifts it claims?

The people seem to have reached a point where they must choose between unity and Mr. de Valera.

Sunday Independent, 21 May, 1943

One Of The Crucial Moments In Our History

1944-05-28

It is a sobering as well as a gratifying thought that the generation which is now rapidly becoming the majority of our electorate is the first freeborn Irish generation for many centuries. The other day a young candidate at the present election made a striking appeal to his contemporaries to come forward and take charge of our public affairs. There are more signs this year than last year that the young men and women who have no remembrance of Ireland's servitude are beginning to stir themselves from the curious apathy which has so long kept them in bonds. Perhaps, they will make themselves felt on Tuesday next.

If so, their intervention will not have come a day too soon. It is they who will have to suffer for any mistakes made at what promises to be one of the crucial moments in our history.

The whole world is just now preparing to sweep forward into a new era. Ireland cannot be an exception. Whether we like it or not, the next five years are going to present us with problems which it will take all our ability, all our good sense, all our united loyalty to our country and to one another to answer correctly.

Young People Are Hardly Satisfied

So far we have managed along on the ideas and personalities left over since the last Great War and its aftermath. If our young people, who have so long been quiescent, ask themselves what we really have to show for our twenty odd years of freedom, it is hard to believe that they can be very highly satisfied with such replies as they can find to their question. Our political system, upon which so much else depends, is the relic of a foolish civil-war fought over twenty years ago.

Every political, social, economic, educational or other question that arises among us is still debated in the light of the civil war and the sides men took in it.

Our Prime Minister has just informed us that in his opinion all wisdom on all such questions was and remains with those who took one side. His party consists exclusively of men who in 1922 opposed the Treaty because it did not give them a Republic. They have been in power for twelve years, and although they have done many strange things, they have not yet themselves given us that Republic for which they then destroyed the unity of the country.

It is true that now and again they still call themselves the Republican Party: but they have given no sign at all of making the title a reality.

Many people may say that they show sense in this refusal to live up to what was the fundamental reason for their existence. Nevertheless, the young citizen, newly come to the responsibilities of freedom, must ask himself if all can be healthy with a State thus for twelve years administered on the basis of a sham.

“Republican Party” Not What It Claims To Be

The “Republican Party”, is clearly not in any real sense of the word what it claims to be. Are its leaders to any greater extent the repositories of wisdom, political, social, and economic, than they are of republicanism?

The truth is that the whole of the alleged policies to which they lay claim were adopted by them as a mere afterthought. In order to make their opposition to the Treaty more palatable to the mass of the people.

They proclaim themselves to be in economics the disciples of Arthur Griffith. While Arthur Griffith was alive and they were fighting for “the Republic” they were less eager to

protest their discipleship. It was only four or five years after his heart was broken that they had the brilliant idea of becoming his heirs and successors.

Their “economic policy” is a thing of shreds and patches, a travesty of everything ever preached by previous national leaders, put together for the purpose of winning a general election, and leading in practice from the revaluation of bacon and butter to the recent highly beneficial operations on the railway stock-market.

If the people of our towns now have to do without heat in winter or pay three times its economic price for turf, the credit for this satisfactory outcome of their “national policy” must rest with the abnormally wise and far-seeing leaders of the “Republican Party.” If we escape a famine every spring by a few weeks, and if our trains can only run every three days or so, the praise is due to the same set of wise and uniquely-gifted men.

If the Irish language, which was the inspiration of our whole independence-movement, has become a bore and a burden to the children in our schools, our thanks must go to the idealists who between them have a monopoly of all the wisdom and patriotism of Ireland.

Has To Swallow Rather A Lot

The young citizen who has to swallow these claims to wisdom and virtue has, it must reasonably be admitted, to swallow rather a lot. In all probability he takes very little interest in the pros and cons of the civil war. Indeed, it is to be feared that the operation of the “national policy” for the last twelve years has made him feel just a little bored about the Republic which the National Party exists not to declare. He sees, if he is awake to his responsibilities, that nearly everything the Party has done has been done, not for his good, but just to please the Party’s heaven-sent leader, at whose birth, as his faithful biographer assures us, the stars themselves were in commotion.

In his speeches during the present election campaign, the leader has shown certain signs of pique. For whatever reason, he does not like the way things are going. Especially does he not like the suggestion that “the Emperor has no clothes”—the emphasising of the glaring fact that his Ministers are notoriously not the geniuses he and they say they are.

On one point he is quite clear and definite: he will only do what the people want if it happens to be also what he himself wants.

If we do not agree by our votes that the Fianna Fail Ministers are the only able, intelligent, and patriotic men the country possesses, then Ireland can expect no cooperation from Mr. de Valera. In fact, by his definition, national unity means that the nation must shut its eyes and swallow what he gives it. If it refuses, he will take again to the cross-roads. Clearly, as far as Mr. de Valera can help it, the young citizen is not going to be allowed yet awhile to lay the ghost of the civil war.

Sunday Independent, 28 May, 1944

Problem In Re-Education Of Parents

1944-06-04

The question of children's attendance at cinemas has become prominent again. Certain local authorities have seriously debated it, and one or two of them have made regulations forbidding the picture houses to children, at night.

Such discussion is a very healthy sign of the times, and the action taken is good as far as it has gone.

But the problem is highly complicated and raises many more difficulties than may appear at first sight.

To begin with, the fundamental matter of responsibility: the crowding of picture-houses by children is only a symptom of the shocking lack of parental control that is one of the greatest evils of our age and a growing evil. The same irresponsibility is to be seen in connection with all forms of amusement, private as well as public. The invasion of the home by wireless has left the children of careless parents open to a host of new dangers. Even the children of the well-to-do are at least as much subject to this widespread evil as are the children of the poor.

Changes At Dances

During the last twenty years, for example, there has been a complete change in the matter of dancing. Formerly it was centred to a great degree on the home and the family. When young people went to public dances, which they did only rarely and by way of great occasions, they went with their elders, and brought the atmosphere of the home and the family along with them. Since the last war there has grown up the institution of the commercial dance, to which young people resort indiscriminately, with the minimum of attention, if any, from their elders. The dance hall is not confined to the remoter and wilder regions of the country. It is present in the cities, too.

In England, if the evidence of countless novels and stories can be believed, this indiscriminate pursuit of amusement has led to a widespread breakdown of morality and a disappearance of almost all barriers between respectability and its contrary. In Ireland the influence of the Catholic religion is so great that even the present lack of restraint and control has so far done comparatively little harm. Few who know anything about the matter could, however, honestly say that it has done no harm at all; and there seems to be an irresistible force dragging us into imitation of other nations habits, a force which compulsory Irish has so far done nothing to lessen.

In Former Times

It is a complete mistake to suppose that this problem of the cinemas and the dance halls is confined to the poor. One excuse that is frequently offered for the crowding of children to picture-houses is that their parents have nowhere to keep them at home. This is, of course, unfortunately too true, but it is not a relevant excuse in this case. Its force is destroyed by two facts: first, that the parents used to manage somehow or other when there were no cinemas and when homes were far worse than to-day; and, secondly, that the children of the well-off go to the pictures quite as much in proportion to their numbers as do those of the poor. No: the problem is not really an economic problem at all.

It is almost entirely, in so far as it is a problem, one of parental responsibility, and on exactly the same footing as the problem of the dance hall.

For some reason, the modern parent has made up his or her mind that he or she will not keep as strict a watch, on the children as they used to in times gone by. Probably with

us, as I have suggested, the decision is principally a matter of fashion, of contacts with the Anglo-American world, which hems us in on every side.

The Christian family was one of the very special products of Christian civilisation, which has begun to disappear under the pressure of “modernity,” the great industrial city, the civilisation of mass enjoyments and material satisfactions.

Our Greatest Hope

Our greatest hope in this country is that the Irish are, or at least have been, a very conservative people. In spite of what we may call Anglo-American “pressure,” they have always so strongly resisted all influences from outside that their own character and way of life has survived in the end, battered perhaps, but still native and vital. This particular influence is one of the most deadly and one of the most pervasive that has ever assailed us.

Our greatest danger is that we are to such a strange degree unconscious of it. Brute force is far easier to recognise and fight than an attractive fashion.

Far too many of us still refuse to recognise that there is anything at all at stake, or that questions of such an abstract kind, which have to do with such things as taste, control, and responsibility, have anything to do with us. Intervention in such questions by the State or the public authority is just as likely to do harm as good. At best the public authority can only act indirectly, by driving home to individuals the responsibility that is theirs, not by purporting to exercise that personal responsibility itself. We have here a great problem in education, or rather in re-education; and the people who need the re-education are not the young people, but the grown-ups.

Sunday Independent, 4 June, 1944

For Men and Nations The Surest Way To Make A Profit Is....

1944-06-11

It is now almost a banality to refer to the Danish Folk High Schools, which have been internationally famous for over half a century. Their praises have been often sung, and they have often been held up as models, not only to us in Ireland, but even to Great Britain, with its very much richer and better-endowed educational institutions. Recently Sir Richard Livingstone made the interesting suggestion that some of the great English country houses, which have become too expensive to keep up as private residences, should be turned into Folk High Schools. In general, however, except in the other Scandinavian countries, these schools have met with more praise than imitation.

This is not meant to be an article about schools: the Folk High Schools are only mentioned because of the principle on which they are founded, for the sake of its wider bearing. It is hardly sufficiently recognised that these schools, which are credited with the revival and expansion of Danish agriculture, have owed their success to the fact that they are strictly non-vocational.

The education they impart is purely religious and cultural; its means is the teaching of history and literature, not as subjects in a curriculum, but as related to a moral view of life.

It is directed, not towards cramming with facts boys and girls from ten to fourteen, but towards inducing the adult of eighteen and upwards to live according to principles derived from the Lutheran faith and from Danish nationality.

Things Of The Spirit

These schools and their remarkable contribution to Danish economic progress are surely among the outstanding proofs of the futility of utilitarianism. In a world where everything is measured and valued by the speed with which it brings in a money-return, and where everything not designed to produce an immediate profit is scoffed at as useless, these schools have shown that the surest way to make a profit is to concentrate less directly on it as an end in itself.

They have shown that music, history, and poetry have much more than a merely ornamental or sentimental value. Seldom were two leaders of thought more practical or scientific than Grundtvig and Kold, who founded the High Schools on the principle that if you seek first the things of the spirit all else shall be added unto you.

The lesson is one that could easily be applied to the whole field of education. We are nowadays obsessed with what is called "vocationalism," with specialised training for particular jobs, with "science," and with practical teaching. It would be easy to show that even in our own experience in this country the emphasis on the practical and the contempt for theory can be greatly overdone.

Any scientist who knows his job will tell you that the most fruitful kind of research is never the kind that starts off with a definite, practical object, but the kind that is its own end, where the researcher is not interested in practical applications, but merely wants to know how things happen. This is merely a particular instance of a law which governs all mental activity. The mind does not work mechanically or in a straight line. It is not a tool except metaphorically; it is a living thing, indeed the most living part of a man.

Way To Prosperity

Now, in spite of Marx and his disciples, who believe that historical change is caused by mechanical forces, all human activity of a purposeful kind is mental activity. Social and

economic progress does not take place because of obscure chemical or physical changes in matter, but because men make up their minds that it shall take place: In fact, social and economic progress is only one part of a whole pattern of essentially mental activity for which the name is civilisation.

The lesson of Grundvig and Kold amounts to this: that the more civilised a people makes itself, the more economically prosperous it will become.

Perhaps the most terrible heresy into which mankind ever fell was the belief that economics could be isolated from other activities and made sovereign over them. It has produced a civilisation in which economic success itself has become a short cut to barbarism. Last week a distinguished English scientist made some little sensation by a wireless talk in which he attributed the present disasters of Europe to the fact that the refusal to allow any validity to moral or spiritual principles had been carried further by Continental teachers than by those of any other part of the globe. Perhaps that is why the Folk High Schools never caught on outside Scandinavia. There was no place for them in a world which did not believe in the existence of the spirit.

Films And The Nation

If States would only take to heart the lessons of Folk Schools, that in itself would amount to a very beneficent revolution. It would have effects far outside the purely educational field. It would mean that governments would estimate their success rather by the amounts they could spare for music, poetry, architecture, painting and sculpture than by their expenditure on purely economic ends.

Artists, writers, teachers, and men of learning in general would be endowed and esteemed as they were in medieval Ireland, when poets were given great estates for their support and were the equals of the highest in the land.

The cinema would no longer be left to aliens to provide over tired masses with canned amusement, there would be a national cinema institute with a grant not proportioned to the income it could make but to the spiritual and cultural returns it could give.

The radio would no longer be carefully managed so as to bring in a handsome sum to the Exchequer while scandalously underpaying those who work for it.

Abbey Actors' Salaries

The salaries of Abbey actors would rise to an average level higher than those of Dublin street-cleaners. In short, an Irish Government would make it its business to do what Sinn Féin always promised it would do when The Day came: become the agent and instrument and patron of an Irish cultural revival.

Sunday Independent, 11 June, 1944

Gallery Of Dreams That Did Not Come True

1944-06-18

Two Ministers of State last week laid aside the black-is-black and white-is-for-ever-white and never the twain shall meet technique. One of the two, a champion of many compulsions in education, went so far as to say that every town boy ought to have the opportunity to acquire a knowledge of arts and crafts. In essence, he meant that every boy ought to be taught how to wield a hammer without knocking his thumb in at the same time as the nail.

That sounded good and true from an Education Minister. But why, if the conviction is held, is not this sort of education put through with just that little bit of compulsion which is all the cry in other ways? So far as it indicates a recognition of real values, it is a grand gesture. But if the arts and crafts are to continue the losing fight for that vital hour or so in the current school programmes, then the pious hope for youth is only one more of the exhibits in our greatest national collection—the gallery of the dreams that did not come true.

The other Ministerial statement should become epochal in our history. It was no more and no less than the admission that his predecessors in office of a different Party had had so many difficulties to put up with in the circumstances of the times that it was impossible for them to move freely towards those objectives that they and the country at that time desired. This generous admission after so many years of the sheep and the goats segregation system of political thinking and acting is truly memorable. In a little while we shall be emancipated from the fierce logic of the black and the white and no intermediate colour tolerated.

Courage And Honesty

On the day when we in Ireland have the courage and elementary honesty to admit these things before and not after the crisis we shall be a truly civilised people, and not, as so often now, a caveman-complex community, cashing in all the time on suspicion, soft-soap and chicanery. It is not a case of advocating a philosophy of compromise in the debased sense of that word.

It is only a plea for common sense and that form of honesty that does really pay, because, unlike the conventional post-factum honesty, it does not undo itself by its own internal schemes of trickery.

There must be something wrong with our systems of education altogether, considering how the majority of us in our after-school life demand the absolute yea or nay and no halfway halt to take breath before making the vital decision.

A like defect in our sense of portion is seen in the use of the superlative when the simple statement would convey the truth without need of trimming. It is as if we knew we would not be believed in any case and therefore, attempted the tour de force method of using the wildest words available. The best example ever of that balloonic attitude to the truth was comically heard at one of the recent election meetings in O'Connell Street, Dublin. There was an array of distinguished people on the platform, whose records were good enough to speak for themselves without further tribute. But the orators did not think so.

One speaker told us that he had known Candidate A. for almost half a century, and all through the years he had regarded him as “the greatest son of Ireland.” That preliminary superlative was all very well until another speaker told us that Candidate B. was the “greatest statesman in Europe.”

Intelligent people accept such statements with that numb consent with which they listen to all those absurd misuses of language and reason.

If only we could see and enjoy the humour of these stumbling over-statements all might be well with us.

But who, nowadays, ever can discover any gleam of good-natured humour in the queer huckster work of party politics? And yet, even so, there is reason to rejoice a little. One Minister has spoken. May his example be widely followed!

Sunday Independent, 18 June, 1944

A Children's Freedom War Has Restored

1944-07-02

The war has brought many privations, even to the few remaining neutrals. We have by now reached a position in which we can fairly sympathise with the Englishman who no longer takes very much interest in what he eats. Travelling, even for short distances, has become a laborious exercise, and holidays are best taken near home. Yet, all the privations have not made life in Ireland by any means intolerable. In some ways they have actually helped to render it less dangerous than it was up to 1939.

When petrol was plentiful and most people could have a car, our roads were yearly becoming less and less safe for anything except speeding motorists, and not too healthy even for them. This was true not only of the great main roads and the vicinity of big towns.

Vigilance was necessary for survival even on quiet country byways, where at any moment death could come rushing at you round a bushy corner.

The worst part of this continuous threat to life and limb was its effect on children. No longer could they play innocently by the roadside or dart in and out through gaps in its hedges. Already the youngest inhabitants of the remotest country districts had been forced to acquire something like the city man's carefully drilled caution about using the roads.

There was a special danger in life for city children visiting the country, because on country roads there is seldom the comparative safety of footpaths, and the rules of the deadly game of dodging the motor cars were sufficiently different to impose extra penalties on the inexperienced.

Children everywhere had to be taught to avoid the roads or be very wary in using them.

Freedom Limited

It is hard for grown-ups to realise how severe were the limits thus set on their childish freedom. The same limitations applied in large measure to grown-ups who liked walking or cycling. As long as twenty years ago I remember saying that the age of the bicycle was rapidly coming to an end. It was an exaggeration, but not an unpardonable one.

To be a cyclist in Dublin before 1939 required very special courage, agility, and trained skill; and the main roads of the country were not much better than the Dublin streets.

With the decline of cycling a whole age of romance and simple adventure seemed to be disappearing.

When people brood on their privations, they are apt to forget that war and petrol-rationing have given us a kind of Indian summer in which children, cyclists, and the more absent-minded among pedestrians can enjoy what is probably destined to be a brief interlude of freedom, and safety from the motorist.

Five years ago our children, if allowed out on the roads round Dublin at all, had to be accompanied by some watchful elder if they were to have any chance of a safe return. Since petrol became scarce they have been almost free from such dangers; they can ramble off along the roads for miles by themselves, or learn to cycle and become little Centaurs of the wheel; able to give each other lifts on cross-bars or carriers with hardly any fear of the disaster that certainly would have awaited such tricks in the lamented days of peace. The children who have spent their earlier schooldays in Ireland since the war have enjoyed privileges of this kind such as only the middle-aged remember, and such as the coming generations are unlikely to taste again.

The Future....?

Rid of the incubus of mechanical "progress," they have known a miraculous return to that freedom which the motor seemed to have killed forever. And only the fanatical believer in

“progress” at all costs, or the exponent of speed for its own sake, will deny that on the whole they have immensely benefited.

It is probably too much to ask that in planning for the wonderful post-war world, about which so much is heard, we should not forget the advisability of trying to preserve for our children some of this immunity which war has so paradoxically brought them. When petrol again becomes plentiful and cars cheap, there is a great danger that in our enthusiasm for the renewed possibilities of speed we may forget the necessity to safeguard the life of the non-motorists, who are the majority of the people.

Our roads were quite inadequate for heavy motor-traffic before the war; they will need a great deal of planning to make them safe for the sudden great increase we may reasonably expect once the war is over. That planning should include, on all the main highways, special, and adequate provision for cyclists and pedestrians.

Another difficult problem will be the high proportion of inexperienced motorists, especially young people, whom the war has prevented from learning to drive in the ordinary way. A third problem will be the devising of precautions for the numerous children who have hitherto been accustomed to almost complete freedom of movement on all kinds of roads.

If we are not to have a huge increase in accidents and unnecessary deaths we shall need to think out solutions for all these problems before the crisis of peace is upon us.

It will not do to let things take their course, throw open our present roads to indiscriminate use by motorists, and then lament in vain over the disasters that will certainly ensue.

Sunday Independent, 2 July, 1944

The Gaels And Start Of Our National Movement

1944-07-16

A distinguished English historian, Professor Butterfield, of Cambridge, has pointed out in a recent work that every country has two kinds of history. There is the sort of scientific history expounded by the classic German nineteenth-century school, whose great teacher was Leopold von Ranke; and there is the sort of history in which the ordinary citizen consciously or unconsciously believes.

The first sort is as modern a phenomenon as evolution or Marxian communism: it was unknown before the nineteenth century, and all previous historians were to a greater or less degree concerned with the second sort.

Scientific history gives the story of a people as seen from outside. It seeks the facts "as they exactly happened," and perhaps its most successful work has been done in fields where materials are, or have until recently been, scanty or of a peculiar obscurity. Prof. Butterfield cites as its most typical product the history of ancient Assyria, as it has been pieced together from documents written on clay tablets.

Vital history, on the other hand, is essentially the story a community tells itself to account for its own actions. It has nothing to do with facts or documents, but "is written in a people's eyes."

In England

Perhaps the most imposing example of this vital or popular history is the Whig tradition in England. This is the story as told by such writers as Macaulay to account for and justify the revolution of the seventeenth century, which overthrew the Stuarts and established parliamentary government.

Essentially it is the one-sided presentation in narrative form of a purely partisan case which is at least as much poetry as history.

It began to be composed under James I. and Charles I.; its earliest authors were men like Coke and Pym, whose true characters have only recently been fully delineated by historians of the other school, but who must always remain heroes to believers in the Whig tradition. Scientifically speaking, this tradition has not much more real truth in its composition than the story of the sons of Mileadh or the tale of Hengist and Horsa. One of the greatest—indeed perhaps the greatest—achievements of Mr. Hilaire Belloc is to have demonstrated its falsity anew to a generation which had been brought up with implicit faith in it. False though it be, however, it is the historical justification for what is nowadays called democracy—the system of representative government which is claimed to be one of the issues of the present terrible war.

Pathetic Fallacy

It used to be the fashion among historians of the scientific school to despise the other kind of history and to suppose that once its falsity had been demonstrated it was at once eliminated from the field and deprived of its importance. This is, of course, in a sense the case with ancient legends like the tale of Romulus and Remus. The present unimportance of such legends is not, however, due to their lack of scientific truth, but to the fact that they have served their turn: the communities whose existence and actions they once explained have vanished, and their vitality has gone with their purpose.

What the scientific historian is apt to forget is that present-day communities do not live on scientifically-ascertained facts any more than did those of the past.

Their legends have changed in character, have, perhaps, become less poetical and romantic: but they have not necessarily become any more true. Indeed, it is exceedingly doubtful whether whole communities can live at all, or have any effective understanding of themselves, if they are compelled to rely solely on the kind of truth admitted by the scientific historian.

There is no more pathetic fallacy than the idea, which a limited form of literary education seems to have made very common, that we "should cease to live in the past."

Influence Of Ancestors

Almost all our actions, as well as our thoughts, are conditioned for us by those of our ancestors, sometimes more than a thousand years ago. The obvious example of this patent fact is, of course, religion, which in one aspect is an inherited tradition. But this dominance of the past holds good in every department of our lives, and it is childish to suppose that we can escape it.

Not only are we dominated by the past, but what controls us is by no means necessarily the truth about the past. Far more often it is a legend like the Whig tradition, whose origins go back for centuries and whose roots sometimes stretch into very queer places.

The tradition of Irish nationalism, still immensely powerful over our lives, is very much a legend of this kind, and indeed has a close enough kinship with the Whig tradition itself. It goes back to the Ireland of the Eighteenth Century, "founded" on the "glorious, pious, and immortal memory" still so dear to the Orangeman.

The native Irish have given this tradition a very powerful twist, so as to turn it almost entirely away from its origin

So powerful is the bias that very many will insist, in the face of all scientific evidence, that such men as Wolfe Tone were Gaels.

Perusal of such a book as Dr. McDowell's *Irish Public Opinion, 1750-1800*, is sufficient to show how little the Gaels had to do with the beginnings of our national movement. What has happened is that the natives here have taken over for their own purposes, and used with terrific effect, a tradition which originally did not belong to them, but whose inherent possibilities they were clever enough to recognise. In Ireland the Whig tradition has been turned with astonishing success against its originators and legatees.

Sunday Independent, 16 July, 1944

Dublin Of Future May Be Menace To Ireland?

1944-07-23

The prophet Jeremiah lived in an evil time, and saw many of the evils that he prophesied being fulfilled. In his lifetime he was subject to much persecution because his prophecies were distasteful to the complacency of his contemporaries. The modern Jeremiah has no divine inspiration to rely upon; he is a scientist, and the raw-material, so to speak, of his prophecies is statistics. By their means one can frequently show that a particular community is subject to an inexorable law which is quite certain to lead to its decline or even its extinction. If he has the disadvantage of not being divinely inspired, he is perhaps, better off than Jeremiah in that he is seldom imprisoned for his “unpatriotic ideas.” The modern world treats its scientific seers with more respect than the ancient world showed to its religious prophets: but it hardly pays them much more heed.

The Hebrew prophet, in virtue of his divine office, had the power to give positive advice to his people. He could, at least say to them: “Bend down your necks under the yoke of the King of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and you shall live.” His modern counterpart rarely gives constructive advice: he merely emphasises what is in fact taking place. His great function is to point to the existence of trends, which for the most part have their causes deep in the past or in the unconscious psychology of peoples, and whose effects will work themselves out, whatever conscious efforts are made to deflect or thwart them.

Worst In Rural Areas

Population-statistics provide the expert with trends of this kind. He has shown over and over again in recent times that the population of most European countries, after more than a century of tremendous expansion, is tending inexorably to decline, and that no legislative or administrative devices have any real power to check this tendency. Here in Ireland, while the general decline is less marked than elsewhere, it is particularly powerful among the rural population. The Minister for Finance was quite right when he pointed out in the Senate that no Government is really to be blamed for this regrettable development. Its causes are remote and mysterious, and it is the Irish aspect of a movement which in fact is European.

There is no need to insist on the regrettable nature of this rural decline.

If, as seems to be the case, it is inevitable, there is a grave danger that it will definitely alter for the worse the whole character of the people.

The statisticians declare that there seems to be an optimum relation between the population of the towns and that of the country. Whereas in Great Britain the balance has swung probably too far in favour of the town, in Ireland it still inclines rather to the side of the country. In order to reach the common European standard, we should have more people in our towns and cities and less on the land.

To those of us who are keenly conscious that the typical Irishman has hitherto always been a countryman, and who believe that the countryman’s virtues are vitally necessary to our future as a people, this tendency to move from the country to the towns is sad news.

It is not made any more cheerful by the reflection that so far the main beneficiary by this tendency to a shift in the balance of population has been the city of Dublin, which keeps on growing steadily while the rest of the country is emptying.

Lessons Of Austria

There are those who look forward with misgiving to a time—perhaps when our grandchildren have come to maturity—when half the population of Ireland will be living in and around a gigantic, Dublin, which will by that time have absorbed all Dublin county and spread into Wicklow. The analogy of Austria after the last war looms up in the minds of these gloomy

visionaries: a land where the attenuated rural population could no longer support a bloated capital city, with the result of chronic and incurable social and political unrest.

In Ireland such a development will be even more serious, for not only will the typical or average Irishman no longer be a man of the country: he will also be a Dubliner. If this be anything like a true forecast, most of us will agree that here is a tendency which we should do all we can to thwart or at least to deflect.

Let us concede to the prophet-statistician the inexorability of his law. Let us admit that a further shift in the balance between town and country, in favour of the former, is inevitable. Is it inevitable that in our case the town should be Dublin? Can we do anything to insure that instead of resembling Austria we shall rather resemble Switzerland, where a flourishing rural community is served by at least five good-sized cities, approximately equal in population?

Example Of Switzerland

Although Switzerland has over four million inhabitants, its largest city, Zurich, is only half the size of Dublin. There may be a possibility that, by careful planning, we can, while not attempting to go dead against the stream, at least insure that we shall not be swept away by it.

All indications suggest that, instead of vainly trying to keep our present proportions on the land, we should so develop our towns and smaller cities as to provide some sort of counterpoise for our overgrown capital.

Such a policy would demand a generous provision, in addition to local industries, of schools, halls, theatres and museums in our urban centres. A lively and diversified small town culture offers the best hope of escape from the fate that threatens to crush us.

Sunday Independent, 23 July, 1944

Where Is Planning Leading Us?

1944-07-30

The world was never so full of plans as it is at present. Almost everybody, is a planner of some kind, and there seems to be a general feeling that all we need for happiness is to hold a planners' congress and give them their heads.

Now the curious thing about all this planning is its newness.

Twenty years ago, when the biggest plan that modern Ireland has known was in its early stages, it was not a plan at all; it was a scheme, and its promoters were sometimes jocosely called schemers.

The beginning of the planning era can be precisely dated, and the date has a significance which has perhaps been a little overlooked. It all began, like more other things than we commonly suspect, in Soviet Russia, with the inception of the first great Five Year Plan in 1927.

State Control.

Nothing is more characteristic of our time and civilisation than our general carelessness about the origin of an idea, provided the idea appeals to us. The appeal may be quite superficial, a matter of more or less accidental prejudice, or it may be the outcome of skilful advertising. Indeed the whole essence of advertisement is to isolate some idea which can be associated with an actual or potential want, and to drive home this idea by repetition into the collective mind until it calls up the want which corresponds or has been made to correspond with it.

The idea of planning is associated in this way, perhaps remotely but still insistently, with the idea of State control or ownership of the means of production. Once its logic is examined, this association is quite obvious, for there is no point in State planning without such control or ownership. But it is part of communist technique to isolate the idea of planning, to boost it as a thing good in itself, so that by skilful propaganda the world may be brought a long step nearer the acceptance of the Marxian doctrine without knowing what is happening to it.

Irish advocates of planning are, of course, far from being communists, although no doubt a careful search would discover a few disciples here and there among the most vociferous of them. The enormous majority of them are very patriotic and well-meaning citizens, who wish to help their country. What they hardly see quite clearly enough is that while meaning to do good they run the risk, if they are not very careful, of doing great, and perhaps irreparable harm.

Living As Slaves

“Plan” and “planning” are after all only innocent words, and it would be ridiculous to treat them as sinister in themselves. It is not the words, nor even the idea of planning taken in isolation, that are dangerous, but the fact that too much insistence on them, may easily land us all into a most odious and degrading kind of servitude.

If we become so enthusiastic about planning that our enthusiasm induces us to make light of liberty, that we think nothing, for the sake of symmetry and convenience, about subjecting the free citizen to controls and regulations which deprive him of his freedom, then our plans, no matter how glittering they may be, are plans for slavery. If we are so impressed by the problem of poverty that we think any price, including the loss of liberty, worth paying for its abolition, we are working ourselves into the position of a doctor who would cure headaches by cutting off heads.

It has been remarked many times that perhaps the most terrible thing about the French Revolution was the incompatibility of the promises implied in its slogan. There can be no real liberty unless there is inequality, and there can be fraternity in the complete absence of either equality or liberty. Like the abolitionists of poverty, the apostles of equality are often, without knowing it, the agents of tyranny.

The Lesson

The lesson of all this is that we should be careful in the midst of our planning enthusiasm.

If planning is to be fruitful of good, its first object ought to be not prosperity nor equality, but liberty under the law.

Lawless liberty has, indeed, brought the world into a mess; but it is the lawlessness, not the liberty, that is at fault. We should keep away from all plans that imply the assumption of ownership or control by the State.

Plans which have liberty for their goal must also have liberty as part of their essence. In other words, good will be done only by local and vocational groups and associations planning, not for others, but for themselves. The State should not be called upon to operate plans designed to turn Ireland into a smoothly-working, carefully coordinated machine in which only one mind will be allowed to function freely.

Growing Civil Service

The most beneficent role the State can play is that of promoting, calling into being, and encouraging local and vocational groups.

So far our new Irish State has shown singularly little tendency to move in the direction of local and professional autonomy. On the contrary, we have the spectacle of a Civil Service which keeps on growing inevitably year after year till it should be easy to calculate when it will have taken in the majority of the adult population. In the same way we have a capital city whose growth goes on unchecked, and apparently must continue to grow until the majority of Irishmen are to be found living in Dublin.

These little problems are only symptoms of the real evils to which our planners, if they are genuine and wide-awake, should give their urgent attention.

Sunday Independent, 30 July, 1944

The Irish Empire Overseas

1944-08-06

Ireland, out of touch with the world to-day more than for a very long time, is going through a curious phase of forgetfulness. After generations of recollections of our millions of race-members and friends in distant countries, we seem to be beginning to lapse into the opposite attitude. "And a good thing, too," some one might say, with a certain amount of reason. "At last we are thrown back entirely on ourselves. It is for us to accept the isolation, stand on our own feet and "find ourselves" in the real sense of the words, without expectation and dependence on support from outside, such as we relied on too long."

The sentiment is a praiseworthy one. "Stand on our own feet"—realise that a man must look inward for the sources of character and effort in himself if he wants to be the upstanding citizen of his own country first and of the world after.

It all sounds truth and wisdom according to the philosophers. But there is a flaw in it in our case, judged materialistically, if no other way. It so happens that, microscopic as we are in numbers in our home country as compared with the great peoples of the rest of the world, we assume elsewhere an importance as the mother-country of very many millions of people.

It is not exaggerating the point to say that for every one native-born here, there are ten people with Irish derivations, affiliations or close contacts overseas.

Obviously they are not all going to get hot and bothered every time the name of Ireland is tossed into the ring, but a striking percentage of them still watches our interests and developments, unbidden, as anyone reading, say, the widespread journalism of the U.S.A., even at the moment, can see. Indeed, the defence of this or that attitude lukewarmly enough considered at home is at times taken up by our friends abroad with an enthusiasm that surprises by its good-will. Witness the recent reaction in New York to the news of Mrs. George Bernard Shaw's will! And the Irish in America still make efforts to bring the Partition question to the fore, although at our recent General Election we appeared to have forgotten all about it.

It is true, of course, that the war has upset our relations with many of the Irish abroad. But that will not be permanent unless we ignore what has been happening in the world at large. Every internationalist knows how empires, apparently solidly based, have decayed just because of this ignoring of the honest views of their outlying members. The evidences of that are through all past history; they can be seen in the history even of to-day. So, too, we may lose our empire in the hearts of millions of our hitherto loyal members if we adopt the poker-face policy at this critical hour.

"But what are we to do in the circumstances?" some one will ask. The answer is: "Suspend your judgment."

Let us remember that the new world that will arise out of the wreckage of the war will, for all the talk to the contrary, still be a place where one's friends will count in every country.

Already in the radio of the nations there is evidence of the effort to capture the good-will of communities—even behind all the noise of battle. If it is worth the while of the mighty forces so embarrassed with other difficulties to look ahead like that and attempt to secure an as yet invisible good-will asset in the re-organisation to come, surely we, more than any, ought to be aware of the subtlety. That forward-looking attitude is the true post-war planning for a nation like ours of small regional and economic significance, but still able to exert a subtle pull far from the local base.

Sunday Independent, 6 August, 1944

Tests By Which Eire Fails

1944-08-13

What is the true test of a nation's achievement? By what standards are communities put high or low on the list when historians, who are the judges, come to sum-up their merits or defects?

Up to about a hundred years ago there was a general agreement about the answers to these questions. Nations were judged less by the amount of their wealth and the extent of their power than by the use they made of both. The France of Louis XIV was put higher than India of his contemporary, the Mogul Emperor Aurangzeb, although the latter was very much the richer and more powerful of the two, for the reason that India had nothing to compare with Racine, Moliere, Bossuet, La Fontaine and many other great writers and artists of every kind who made Louis's reign into a French Golden Age.

The nineteenth century produced a criterion upon which Mogul India would probably rank higher than France. This criterion was simply one of quantity. It was first applied by complacent prophets of Victorianism like Lord Macaulay.

According to this criterion what makes a nation great is no longer to be the work of its thinkers, poets, architects, or painters, but the amount of food its people are able to eat and the rapidity with which they can move from one place to another.

Production and consumption, manufacture, trade and transport are now the universal tests by which nations are estimated. Philosophy, poetry, architecture, sculpture, music and the fine arts in general are at best side-issues, luxuries for the nation whose consumption of food is satisfactory, negligible follies for those who cannot rise to an adequate level in the matter of eating and drinking.

Poor Poets

It is to be feared that the standards we unconsciously apply to ourselves in Ireland are not very much better than these. One of the best of present-day English poets has recently had to make the startling statement that you cannot expect to have very much poetry produced if you only pay for it at the rate of five shillings a poem.

Long ago Irish poets were great lords, richly rewarded by the other great lords who were their patrons. Everyone agreed that it was of the utmost importance that they should be adequately remunerated, not only because of their remarkable power to curse those who affronted or made little of them, but because they were thought to be as indispensable to the community as the nobles in whose praise they wrote. Nowadays we no longer set much store by poets, and are hardly willing to keep their wages even at the five-shillings level. Cattle were the chief form of mobile wealth in ancient Ireland, but the traffic in them was differently regulated. I have often thought that, in view of our modern national preoccupations we should have an economic national anthem.

Cases To Deplore

Some of the effects of our adoption of Victorian economic standards as our national ideal are likely to strike a more enlightened posterity as very odd indeed. Let us take the case of the Abbey Theatre, an institution which has brought Ireland and Dublin fame all over the world. At the present moment we have working in the Abbey one of the finest teams of dramatic artists to be found in any capital city, and an actor who has probably scarcely a rival anywhere —one of the really great Irishmen of this generation. It is said that these hard-working artists are paid at rates which vary from 30/- to £7 3s. 0d. a week. The latter figure, of course, applies only to senior players.

The case of the Abbey is a glaring, but by no means an isolated case.

Even worse is the position of those who work for Radio Elreann, particularly script-writers.

And the salary standards applied to the announcers are to be deplored.

Scholars of long years' experience are often very poorly rewarded by the Department of Education for services rendered.

The surprising thing is, not that some of our "intellectuals" are rather radical in their opinions, but that they are not all red revolutionaries.

We have made singularly little progress towards becoming once more an island of scholars since we got our freedom over twenty years ago.

Sunday Independent, 13 August, 1944

War Has Helped The Growth Of Vocational Organization

1944-08-20

The Report of the Commission on Vocational Organization can hardly be said to make light holiday reading. In fact, its publication in the middle of August is bound to be a bit of a constitutional test for readers who are either enjoying their annual vacation or regretfully looking back to it. It would be absurd of me to claim to have already digested this important document. For most of us the digestive process in this case will take some years. But the Report is of such a character that even without profound study it gives rise to many reflections.

The first thing that strikes one glancing through its pages is the public, while the Commission was at work, had very little idea of how wide the scope of its work was. The Report, unlike most similar documents, does not deal with a single carefully isolated problem. It covers practically the whole social and economic framework of the country. One of its most important sections has to do with agriculture. As everybody knows, this is one of the knottiest of all our national problems. The fact that Father Hayes, founder of Muintir na Tire, was a member of the Commission will give readers a very special interest in this section of the Report.

The origin of the Commission was a resolution proposed by Senator Frank MacDermot and seconded by Senator Michael Tierney in the Seanad, in July, 1938. The Government accepted the resolution, which called for a "small commission," but proceeded to appoint a fairly large one, under the chairmanship of His Lordship the Bishop of Galway. The Commission was at any rate very representative. It has worked from early in 1939 to the end of 1943, hearing a great number of witnesses and dealing in turn with every existing form of vocational organisation in the country.

Valuable Work

Whatever may be the final verdict on its detailed recommendations there can be no doubt that the Commission has performed a really great service in its survey of existing organisations, not only in Ireland but in England and on the Continent. Such a survey is obviously the indispensable preliminary to any future development.

Readers will probably be rather surprised to find how very much vocational organisation already does exist, and how it has tended to grow more and more, especially as a result of the various crises which were precipitated by the war.

It was found that total war mobilisation in agriculture and industry can be brought about far more effectively through the co-operation of self-governing associations than by the issuing of bureaucratic decrees.

In Ireland the same tendencies are noticeable as elsewhere, and the growth of voluntary organisations has decidedly increased since the war began. Unfortunately, here, as elsewhere, there has been a great deal of wasteful improvisation, experiments with all kinds of mixed varieties of organisation, in which the State has sometimes—if not, indeed, generally—taken more than the lion's share of control. The careful survey of these various improvised bodies and their activities which the report provides should be of real assistance in their future co-ordination and development on more autonomous lines. The report should certainly have for one of its results the demonstration that vocational organisation is neither a brain-wave born from an emergency nor a slightly lightheaded political nostrum, but a well tried and long-established norm of Christian society.

A Danger

The misuse of the term "Corporate State" has given wide publicity to the idea that vocationalism is somehow connected with dictatorship. If this idea becomes firmly fixed in the minds of citizens as a whole, great and perhaps irreparable disasters will result. Vocationalism is not merely compatible with democratic government. It is, in fact, natural to humanity, as its wide prevalence in so many different countries shows: and one of the greatest wrongs done by dictatorships arises from their all-too-frequent attempts to suppress this natural propensity of human beings to organise themselves in voluntary groups or societies.

The putting into effect of the Commission's recommendations once they have been fully examined and studied will be a task not for a few months nor for any one Government but for many years and for the people as a whole.

Voluntary organisation is incompatible with Government direction or command, beyond a certain minimum. The people themselves will have to take up the idea, which is the idea preached by the late Pope Pius XI in his *Quadragesimo Anno* encyclical. For that reason it is highly desirable that at any rate when the August sunshine and the holiday-time have vanished for another year as many intelligent citizens as possible should apply themselves to the careful study of this pretty formidable report.

Sunday Independent, 20 August, 1944

Are We Forgetting The Present?

1944-08-27

The shocking conditions in which people had to live in rural Ireland only as far back as sixty years ago are well known. Housing conditions were often horrible. One of the changes noted in the country by people who return after a long absence is the improvement in housing. Thousands of cottages have been erected for farm labourers and kindred workers. Too often, however, the new stands side by side or close to insanitary hovels that should long since have been pulled down.

And, incidentally, this leads to the question:— Why are so many wrecks of houses allowed to remain standing in Irish towns and rural areas?

Often the first sight that meets a person entering an Irish town is a number of dilapidated buildings.

Castles In The Air?

Fine talk about post-war plans and wonderful highways for motor cars may sound very well, but a little more practical spadework at the present time could produce a vastly better Ireland. The officials of the Department of Local Government and Public Health should not concentrate too much on future castles in the air.

There is plenty of work to be done to-day.

A Government Department charged with looking after the health of the people should act in accordance with medical teaching, which warns that dirty conditions are a menace to public health. House ruins and rubbish heaps, unclean drains and unswept streets, are, taken separately or jointly, a danger to health. Flies thrive in such conditions. And a medical authority states—

“The household fly is one of the most deadly carriers of disease germs. It is specially adapted as a carrier of typhoid fever and dysentery.”

It was reported during the week that there were 25 cases of typhoid fever, two of paratyphoid and 114 cases of diphtheria in one Dublin hospital. Also, it was reported that in recent months there have been fourteen cases of typhoid fever in Co. Kildare, eight in Co. Wicklow. These facts should be taken as signs of warning.

In Plain Language

Let facts be faced. Some Irish towns are to-day ill-kept. In plain language, they are dirty. Street sweepings are allowed to remain in small dumps on the roads, outside dwelling-houses for days. A strong local lead where such conditions prevail could quickly have the evil practices stopped.

And hundreds of dwellings in rural Ireland to-day are a disgrace to the country. Let the facts not be shirked. Granted, much of the blame may be placed on the people themselves. But the local authorities and the national authorities have duties and obligations in these matters. A question prompted is: “Does the country get value for the money it pays all its local officials?”

There seems to be scope for the co-ordination of the work of Medical Officers of Health, Agricultural and Horticultural Instructors, Poultry Instructresses, town councils and county councils, with a view to making housing conditions much better, especially in certain rural areas. The officials in some county should get together and plan out the general requirements of the rural household. Outside the house itself there should be a garden, in which fruit trees would not be forgotten. (How few we see around Irish rural cottages!) There should be provision for the keeping of poultry, and a paved or concrete pathway should lead to the piggery and outhouses.

Promise Of Electricity

The country is promised a postwar scheme of rural electrification. Electricity will be a great boon for farmers and all those families connected with the land. But it will take years before it can be carried to many homes. Meanwhile now is the time to start to put right many of the things that are wrong in rural Ireland.

Sunday Independent, 27 August, 1944

Are Irish People Lazy?

1944-09-03

Some people in Ireland work too hard. But they are a very, very small minority. The majority of the people do not work hard enough. One of the impressions of foreign visitors is that Irishmen show a lack of industry, a lack of ambition. This the people themselves like to refer to as their “easy-going ways.” Foreigners, however, often use a more direct word—laziness. Are we a lazy people? The retort to the foreign critic may be that appearances are deceptive, that the Irish people are as industrious as any others, and that, abroad, they have a record for hard work beaten by none. Further, the foreigner may be reminded that the ambitions of foreign nations too often bring wars and destruction on the world; and, also, that foreigners—especially the ambitious ones—have a habit of gravely erring when judging other seemingly “easy-going” nations.

A Question

Having steadied our foreign critic, we can afford to be honest with ourselves.

Who will claim that the vast majority of our young men and women turn their leisure time to the best advantage? The policy of “an eight-hour working day” has been preached so much that many people appear to forget there are sixteen other hours in every day. If we grant eight of them for sleep, how many people would like to answer the question: “Do you make good use of your spare time?” And if it is wasted throughout the years, the thought may be appalling!

Hence it is timely, in the midst of so many schemes and plans for the post war years, to consider some planning whereby the people individually and the country as a whole might make better use of time. The Ireland of to-day has faith in itself. It is about to enter a new era in world history. If we are ever to have stopped the state of things which enables the examples of other small countries like Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, to be cast into our teeth, our people will have to be better organised and will have to work harder. Irish footballers and hurlers train specially when they are preparing for a match in which All-Ireland honours are at stake. In other words, they work harder to secure victory.

If our people are to obtain victory in the international competition for industry and commerce they will have to train to win it.

Armies train for battles; so, too, must nations prepare themselves for the battles of peace.

Schools Vital

To-day it often takes far too long to get important works carried out in Ireland.

One of the evils of this situation is that the majority of the people are prepared to tolerate the system of slowness—the system that leads to the charge that Ireland is fifty years behind other countries.

If a people are industrious and go-ahead, they will not endure antiquated methods in the handling of their local and national affairs. To take one example: if there had been a national campaign to rid the country of insanitary schools, no Government would have been able to resist the demands of the people, the demands of parents and teachers. But because we are lacking in that driving force that gets things done, we find ourselves with hundreds—or is it thousands?—of condemned schools after over twenty years of self-government. And it is to the schools we must look for the training of boys and girls who will be able, and willing, to do their share in building a better Ireland. That the girls in many schools throughout the country are not trained to-day in a way that enables them to take their place with skill and confidence at the work to which they are called is the knowledge of all.

Elementary domestic matters baffle them and beat them.

The national policy will have to emphasise the importance of education, of training, and of hard work. The best way to enjoy leisure is to have plenty of work to do. St. Paul has said: "If any would not work, neither should he eat."

Sunday Independent, 3 September, 1944

Give The Citizens A Chance

1944-09-17

Democracy is supposed to mean government by the people, and we are supposed to enjoy a very high degree of democracy in Ireland. Yet everybody knows that what we are getting more and more is government by officials armed with emergency orders and decrees.

We are told that this in practice is what democracy amounts to, and already a great many of our citizens have been bulldozed into believing that when they are obeying some order which they neither like nor fully understand they are exercising the highest privilege of free men—self-government.

Now this is all very well during wartime, and the man in the street, who is a tolerant creature, will put up with it for a while. But the time will come, sooner or later, when he will be sick of it.

The question upon which the whole future of democracy will depend is this: when the time comes, and he makes up his mind that he has enough of bureaucracy and obeying orders, will the man in the street be capable of doing anything for himself? Will years of docile obedience have so atrophied his self reliance and his capacity for cohesion with his fellow-men that he will hug his chains and weakly ask the bureaucrats to carry on? Nobody can deny the very real danger that this may be just what will happen.

Already we have suggestions being quietly but persistently made that, of course, the emergency powers now enjoyed by governments must continue for an indefinite time after the war. Ease and convenience will be all for this course, and it can be urged with many, excellent arguments. But if it is followed it will quite certainly mean the end of democracy. No amount of electioneering or other parliamentary machinery will make any real difference in this respect. Voting once every five years for his choice between two sets of yes-men does not make a man free.

Citizens' Powers

What really does produce free citizens is direct and immediate participation in decisions which immediately concern them and which they are or ought to be competent to manage by their own joint action. This was what the word democracy was first coined to mean. It is what the word still means in countries like Switzerland, the United States, and even to some extent in England—to a far greater extent, at any rate, than in Eire.

Of course, there must be a clear distinction drawn between what the citizens can manage directly and what they can not. The army, it is quite clear, cannot be run on democratic lines. Neither can the finances nor activities like the supply of electricity. There is little difficulty in picking out the functions that must be centralised. What almost all modern governments are doing, partly through pressure of war, is to refuse to make any choice, and insist on centralisation all round.

Local Government

If there is one place more than another where there surely should be the widest scope for democracy, it should be local government.

The citizen should at least be allowed to have a direct and constant voice in the affairs of his own locality. Yet it is precisely in these affairs that he is nowadays given practically no voice at all.

There are two big reasons for this in Ireland. One is the division of the country into over-large administrative units without anything between them and the citizen. The other is the existence of the Local Government Department, whose real function is, as everybody knows, the prevention of local government. Between them, the Department and the County

Manager do quite effectively prevent the citizens from having anything at all to do with what concerns them most. As a result we have untidy towns, mean villages, insanitary schools, neglected graveyards, indescribable boreens, a thousand evils resulting from neglect, apathy, and the nature of our system.

There are two obvious remedies for all this. One is the entrusting of all parish affairs to Parish Councils on which all heads of families will have a voice. The other is the liquidation of the Local Government Department and the transference of its more useful functions elsewhere. Public Health, for example, should be the business of a Public Health Council, as recommended by the Vocational Commission. It is essential that Parish Councils should be statutory and should have wide legal powers in their own areas, dovetailing into the powers of revived and properly organised County Councils. The idea of voluntary Parish Councils is little better than a jest. Experience has proved that voluntary bodies without powers just can't do anything—except, of course, talk, which they can do anyhow. Once Parish Councils are set up they should be let alone as far as possible—hence the necessity to abolish the Department, whose nature it is to interfere. The result might not immediately produce efficiency—but it would be real, live democracy.

Sunday Independent, 17 September, 1944

A Dress Reform For Irish Farmers

1944-09-24

Perhaps one good result that may come from the hardships and privations of the war will be an increased understanding by the townsman of the farmer's difficulties, and a greater sympathy with him in the complaints he sometimes makes. Never before in the history of the world have so many nations felt the effect of blockade and counter-blockade. Never at any rate since the Industrial Revolution of two hundred years ago have so many communities been compelled to rely on their own resources for the essentials of life.

As food is the chief essential, this has meant that the farmers everywhere have enjoyed a sudden very great increase in their importance.

Unfortunately, as regularly happens, this has also means an increase in responsibility. Thus the farmer, who used to be the most independent, if at the same time the worst remunerated, member of the community, has found himself for the past four years subjected to an amount of regulation and control far greater than he has ever hitherto known.

It is rather a pity that more has not been done, by such agencies as the wireless and the cinema, to bring home to the Irish townsman the extent of his debt to the farmer, and the enormous burden of additional work that the farmer has had to do in order to provide the food, without which the past four years might have been as catastrophic as the years from 1845 to 1847. Every credit is due to the Government departments concerned with our food supply, but even the most indulgent critic must admit that there have been mistakes, miscalculations, and errors of procedure, due in part to inexperience and to the vastness of the problems involved, but also to lack of foresight and to a certain stubbornness in the pursuit of inappropriate policies.

Whatever errors have been committed have had to be paid for in the last resort by the farmer, who all the time has been producing enormously increased quantities of food, especially of grain, and who would pretty certainly have also given us ample supplies of both butter and bacon if he had only got half a chance.

No doubt the farmers have been fairly rewarded for their work: but few townspeople realise as fully as they should how exacting the work has been.

Much Harder Work

There are probably not many farmers in Ireland who have not found themselves compelled to till at least twice as much land as before the war, and a large number have had to do far more than this. Extra tillage means extra labour—at any rate, in our unmechanised condition—and the extra labour has been extremely hard to find, so that it is true to say that the average farmer has had to work very much harder in proportion to whatever he has gained in increased prices. There is a big difference in this respect from the last war, when livestock prices soared.

If bread has had to be subsidised, it is only fair to remember the immense amount of extra work involved in producing it. How hard and how nerve-racking that work can be might be realised by the most un-rural townsman during the past fortnight when the weather suddenly turned stormy just as a few weeks drought was badly needed. English newspapers have described this summer's weather as "Quisling weather" because it has been so unfavourable to the attack on "Fortress Europe."

It has been equally unsatisfactory to the food-producer in Ireland, and many a good farmer has seen his whole year's profit gone in two or three days lashing rain just at the crucial moment.

Always In His Thoughts

Those who have lived in the country for any time are familiar with the almost painful concentration of the farmer on the weather. This harvest has shown that it is not entirely due to want of anything else to think about. Although we have in many ways a delightful climate, its charming variety is not exactly conducive to the happiness and contentment of the food-grower. The wonder, indeed, is that we do not make a better attempt to adapt ourselves to it.

We seem to persist in a pretence that we live in a Mediterranean climate, where sunshine can be relied on the whole summer through. This applies to our agricultural methods—even to our obstinacy in trying to grow wheat in a region best suited to rye—but most of all to our dress.

Why do Irish farmers dress like scarecrows of townsmen?

“The Russian farmer has evolved for himself a dress which is at once exactly suited to his weather and vastly more becoming than our incongruous hand-me-downs. In Russia it is the townsman that dresses like a farmer, whereas with us all that distinguishes the farmer from the suburbanite is his more shabby appearance.

The ancient Irish were far more sensibly dressed in their tunics and trews, and above all in the great cloak which made them independent of the weather, and which they seem to have worn right down from prehistoric times to the wars of Elizabeth.

Could not a dress reform be made part of the national revival we hear so much about? Hardly anything, except a more plentiful supply of paraffin for his lamp, would conduce so much to the farmer’s comfort as a properly-designed working suit adapted to the climate he works in.

Sunday Independent, 24 September, 1944

Danger Of State Control

1944-10-01

The decision of the British Government to accept something like the Beveridge Plan as part of their post-war policy has been greeted with general approval,

There is already a suggestion that a similar plan will become inevitable in this country. It seems certain that Northern Ireland will follow whatever the British do; and Eire's position as an economic island in a Beveridge ocean will undoubtedly appear anomalous. We may expect an increasing demand here that we shall imitate our neighbours and not even the Government's promise of an expenditure of a hundred millions on productive works will be able to silence it.

Am I a unique individual, or does anybody else feel about these Beveridge and other plans as I feel? Far from rejoicing at the speed with which the State is taking over so much that the individual citizen has hitherto been left to do for himself, I confess that it fills me with gloom. I do not believe that I am uncharitable or particularly reactionary. Provision for the wants of the poor is a necessity in any form of State or Society, and there can be a great deal of it without any harm being done. As for "reaction," it has become merely a catchword, a handy name with vague derogatory associations which can be applied to anyone you don't like.

What I find frightening is not merely the cost of such schemes gigantic though the cost is sure to be. Someone has made a rough calculation, for example, that an Irish Beveridge Plan would necessitate an extra twenty millions a year in taxation. I don't think advocates of such a revolution have fully realised that its main cost must necessarily fall on the very people who are supposed to benefit from it.

The State will take your money, no longer for purposes special to itself, like defence, but in order to dole it out to you to spend on yourself at such times and in such ways as the State thinks best for you.

Many enthusiasts for planning still seem to believe that there is a big reservoir of wealth, owned by a few selfish individuals, which can be confiscated for financing schemes like the Beveridge Plan. Sir William Beveridge himself has no such illusion. Every employed person must pay 4/3 a week in order to keep the machine going; and in his latest pronouncement, Sir William declares his aim to be the "socialisation of demand."

Control By State

It is easy to pass by such a phrase without asking what it means: but it means either nothing at all or something very interesting indeed. To socialise demand is surely to subject everybody's purchases to control by the State. The Civil Service is to tell the citizen what he is to buy and when.

This fits in admirably with the whole tenor of the Plan. A generation ago the Socialists were strongly resisted when they proposed to abolish private property. The next proposals will have the same effect or even worse, by beginning at the other end. Now the State will leave you your property (in theory), but under the pretext that you must be looked after in your old age and in sickness it will rigidly control every penny you spend. Or perhaps this is unfair. It will not control every penny, but it will take so much that your liberty to do what you like with what's left will matter very little.

The Civil Service

It is, I repeat, not the enormous cost of all such schemes that I find depressing. As a matter of fact the word "cost" in this connexion is rather illusory. How can you be bothered about cost when what is really at stake is an attempt by the State to take over the running of

your whole life? A famous French poet is supposed to have, said: “Live! Our servants will do that for us.”

Sir William Beveridge and his admirers seem bent on creating a dispensation under which our Civil Servants will do it for us. We have already, without seeing anything particularly odd about it, instituted State Paternity and State Maternity. The Government and the Civil Service are almost the father and the mother of us all. The next step is for them to become us: to do our buying and selling and eating and drinking—and of course, our thinking—for us, with only the minimum chance left us to relax within some kind of standard, and oh! so hygienic, State pen.

Evil Of Poverty

Surely there is about all this an element of collective idiocy, a suggestion of paranoia, or at best of fixation? Poverty is an evil, say the planners. We must at all costs abolish it. But in order to abolish it the free individual citizen must cease to exist. It is invidious to deal with the poor as poor, so everybody must be treated as a pauper. The means test is a violation of human dignity, so nobody must be allowed to have any means and all must be under perpetual test.

What makes it all so unbearably funny is the spectacle of the vast efficiency daily displayed by the State in everything it manages. We all know, for instance, what a wonderful institution our Post Office is. It makes a profit out of several services which in other countries are far better performed by private enterprises. Take broadcasting. Our system in Eire is almost a byword for poverty of ideas and inadequacy in their execution. Those who have had close experience of it know that it is red-tape-ridden to a degree that no private business could tolerate.

Then go on to our bigger departments of State—Education, for example. Generally speaking, they are so feeble that they could never survive any competition—if competition were thinkable. Yet this is the machine which it is proposed to adapt for a whole range of new and complicated services. There is a crying need for a movement of resistance against all this planning which is slowly smothering the world. How about making a start with it in Eire?

Sunday Independent, 1 October, 1944

Same Old Hobby-Horses Go Round and Round

1944-10-15

This year's Fianna Fail Ard-Fheis was even less interesting than such gatherings usually are. Perhaps it is memories of Sinn Féin that still cause us, in spite of twenty years' experience, to look with vague hopes of some light or leading to the annual congresses of our political parties. We ought, of course, to know better. We should by now have begun to realise that in political parties what really matters is the small group of professionals or semiprofessionals at the top. The rank and file are merely there to provide a certain amount of noise. We get little enough of light and leading, Heaven knows, from the leaders. It would be nothing short of childish to expect more, or even as much, from their devoted local supporters.

The Irish party organisation, especially as it has recently developed, has some strange affinities with the "unique" party which served a rather similar purpose in the dictatorial regimes in other countries. In both cases the thinking and the formulation of policy is done exclusively at the top. Resolutions of the kind proposed in such numbers last week merely serve the purpose of letting off steam. They contribute nothing at all to what the Taoiseach loves to call "the national objective." That is all settled beforehand, and no violent surmise is necessary to reach the conclusion that it is settled by the Taoiseach. For all Mr. O'Kelly's brave words in winding up the proceedings, about how "we can end Partition as we ended British rule in the Twenty-Six Counties," no one, inside or outside Fianna Fail, expects Mr. O'Kelly to play any very startling part in the dramatic event he purports to visualise. The party is a one-man party. So it was in the beginning, and so it will remain, whether or no Partition be ended.

The Only Way!

Another point of resemblance to certain Continental institutions is provided by the exclusiveness of the party's claims. National salvation, so runs the doctrine, can only be achieved in and through Fianna Fail. One resolution, after "deploring the lack of national spirit in the young," actually recommended the formation of a youth section, called, of course, by the Irish equivalent of Balilla, in each local club in order to combat this defection. Outside Fianna Fail there is no national redemption even for the young, who must be hard put to it to grasp what the "national objective" is all about.

This principle, of course, operates also at the other end. One of the chief items in the "national objective", appears to be to keep those who supported the hated Treaty of 1921 and opposed the Taoiseach in the Civil War from ever playing any prominent part in the nation's political affairs. Almost the only qualification for a Ministry is to have been on "the right side" in the events of twenty years ago. That this qualification carries with it an obvious age-limit is one of the little vagaries of chance we must all just put up with.

Turf For Dublin

The Taoiseach made it as clear as he ever makes anything that no change in Fianna Fail, policy may be expected ever any more. He mentioned wheat, beet, and turf and was diplomatic about our export trade. It is hard to believe that there is any serious intention to continue compulsory tillage after the war. If the attempt is made, Fianna Fail will soon find defections in more than the young. The fact is that compulsory tillage has meant something very like slavery for the farmers, and they will put up with it just as long as the country's real needs demand it, but no more.

What the Taoiseach said about turf is worthy of careful study, not because any particular meaning can readily be extracted from it, but as an example of his strange technique.

“The price was so high that they could hardly ask the people of Dublin to pay it after the emergency,” he said, but went on to declare that “they would have to try to get machine-won turf for Dublin if it could be done at an economic price.” One might think it had been superabundantly proved that it cannot; but you can pay your money and take your choice as to what exactly the Taoiseach had in mind. A guess might be that he intends to continue to force Dublin people to buy dear turf even if cheap coal can be got.

Mr. Donnelly’s Plan

A lot about Partition was said at the Ard-Fheis. Mr. Eamonn Donnelly was surely rather unorthodox from a Fianna Fail point of view in his proposal to ask all political parties in Eire “to co-operate in hammering out some proposals to be ready before the war ended.” Such co-operation is decidedly no part of the “national objective,” and, indeed, Mr. Donnelly was pretty effectively snubbed before the end when it was made clear that Fianna Fail will do the job alone. In other words, the Taoiseach will do it. He will also restore the Irish language in ten or fifteen years, after which it will be too late. Like the turf, this will involve sacrifices, this time of an unspecified nature.

So the same old hobby-horses go on round and round the same old ring to the blare of the same old machine-made music.

Sunday Independent, 15 October, 1944

Must The Irish Railways Be Abandoned?

1944-10-22

In the Dáil debate on the Transport Bill, Mr, Lemass referred to the possibility that at some future date the railways might be altogether dispensed with and all the country's traffic carried on the roads. The Minister of course, was merely visualising, in a perfectly legitimate way, a contingency which it is quite right to provide for in the Bill, so that the new company's hands may not be tied. Nevertheless, his words were seized on with joy by people who appear to think that the sooner the railways are done away with the better, and who evidently regarded his incidental remark as bringing a little nearer the consummation they devoutly wish.

There is a school of thought here, as in other countries, which is so eager for modernity that it almost seems to wish to outrun the spirit if the age itself. This school of thought is all for equipping our poor backward island with the very latest gadgets. Indeed, the wonder is that our modernists are content to stop short with motor-lorries as a substitute for trains, and that they have not already outlined a plan for carrying on our cattle trade by means of transport planes. Their continual advocacy of their various "improvements" has a certain effect in accustoming our minds to the idea that change is inevitable and that the railway is already doomed to the fate of the coach-and-four or the Bianconi.

Series Of Crises

No doubt the railways themselves have furnished quite a few reasonable-looking arguments for believing their doom inevitable. It is true that they have been subjected to a long series of crises. First there was the disorganisation necessarily caused by the last war. Then there were the Black-and-Tan War and the Civil War. Immediately afterwards the competition of the road-borne motor-vehicle became extremely dangerous.

The railways never got time to adjust themselves to one crisis before having to meet another and a worse.

Yet when all due allowance is made, and even when account is taken of the atrocious difficulties created by the present emergency the impartial citizen cannot but wonder if it is really necessary for the railways to be quite as bad as they are.

There was much criticism of the recent "March of Time" film because it selected as subjects scenes so very unrepresentative of present-day Ireland. One is tempted to wish that "March of Time" or some similar organisation would devote one good long documentary to our railway system. Almost everybody in Ireland could tell the photographers what to concentrate on. For example, there is the wonderful efficiency displayed at Westland Row terminus. There is the habit of combining goods wagons with passenger trains running to an alleged time schedule on suburban lines, and the resultant delightful spells of shunting "enjoyed" by the passengers.

"Ancient" Photos

It is not only the delightfully "period" rolling stock, with the quaint ninetyish photos on the carriage walls, which makes one feel that the Ireland of Somerville and Ross is not yet lost and gone forever. The spirit in which the whole system is run is too often the authentic spirit of the "Irish R.M." All this gives food to the futurists who would like to abolish the railway system as an absurd anachronism. It is, of course, highly improbable that the genius which has given our railways their character can ever be driven out utterly in favour of no matter what streamlined and chromium-plated modernity. Here, anyhow, is a case where commonsense is entirely on the side of what may so easily be thought a quaint relic of old

decency. Advocates of universal and exclusive road-traffic regularly talk as if all that is needed were to scrap the railways and put everything on our present roads.

A little reflection is enough to show that before our roads could carry all our present railways carry, they would have to be entirely re-designed and rebuilt.

Indeed, there is every danger that the speedy resumption of road-traffic at its pre-war intensity will cause little short of a nation-wide massacre. Not only are the present roads grotesquely inadequate even for moderate motor-traffic, but the existing provisions for the public safety in regard to them are tragically absurd.

There is something rather priceless about the illogicality of the contrast between the care that is taken to prevent accidents on the railways and the complete carelessness of all concerned on the far more dangerous roads.

Danger Of Road Massacre

Men are actually detailed even yet to see that people cross the railway lines by overhead foot bridges rather than by the level crossings which exist at all stations. Yet the number of trains which pass any point in a day is hardly ever more than a dozen or so, whereas even with the present restrictions there will be more than that number of motor-vehicles passing on almost any main road in an hour or less. On the roads, however, no precautions at all are taken, and the accidents inevitable in such conditions are regarded as merely natural events. Such efforts as those of "safety-first" organisations, while highly laudable, are like trying to keep out the tide with a shovel. If the railway traffic were to be transferred to the roads as things now stand, the loss of life would be equivalent to the depopulation of whole districts.

Before any such transfer can be contemplated there must be a revolution in the management of all transport, a sweeping series of changes in the law relating to responsibility for accidents and their prevention, and, above all, an expenditure on new roads designed for a wide variety of users which will be at least as heavy as the original capital expenditure on the railways.

Sunday Independent, 22 October, 1944

Wanted In Ireland—A Campaign Against Foolish Talk

1944-10-29

In belligerent countries they organised a campaign against what they called Careless Talk. In Ireland we should organise a campaign against Foolish Talk. During the past week, in connection with the annual gatherings of the Irish Tourist Board and Irish Tourist Association, there was a lot of foolish talking. It would be much better for those people who think they are working for the cause of the tourist or holiday-making industry to face facts, to be practical, than to be deluding themselves with windy, worthless statements.

What can you do with a person who, “pushing” the attractions of Ireland, solemnly assures a gathering that we have better attractions for tourists than any other country in the world? One wonders how many other countries have been seen by a person who makes such an idiotic remark. The sooner that type of mentality is knocked out the better it will be for the Irish tourist industry and for the country in general.

Other Countries

We have beautiful scenery—in [Donegal], Kerry, Connemara, Wicklow and many other places. But other countries—England, Scotland and Wales, to name some not very far away—have scenery equally as good. It would be more practical for people in Ireland to realise this, and, very important, to realise that other countries have thousands of attractions that we have not. If a policy of patting each other on the back is adopted, there will be a danger that not enough will be done to enable the country to stand the test of international competition. And much remains to be done in Ireland.

When one hears people speaking about what visitors to our country require when on holidays, and hears them solemnly announce something like this: “Give them good, honest, plain food and plenty of it.” one is inclined to despair of the future of the tourist industry.

Too Much “Plainness”

The trouble about Ireland is that holidaymakers get too much of the “plain” stuff. It is a relief, a joy, to find the hotel where things are DIFFERENT; where food, though good and plentiful, is served in a tasty way. How many of the Irish hotels serve a nice tea? Everybody knows the answer. The reason, presumably, is that the hotel managements lack imagination in every way: they have not the imagination to see that dreary, badly served teas can go far to damage the good impressions created by the other meals: they have not the imagination to see that visitors from other countries attach great importance to this tea; and they have not the imagination required to serve bright and attractive teas. They may look upon this question as a trifle. But, it has been well said that trifles make perfection.

How About Irish People?

The desire to cater for visitors from other lands is excellent. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that in our own people we have a great source from which the holiday industry can be developed.

Thousands of people in Irish towns and villages have never gone on holidays: thousands of them have never experienced the joys of a week or fortnight spent at the seaside. These years of war have shown how important the home holiday-makers are to the hotels. It is a moot point whether the Irish Tourist Board and Association should not stress far more the home than the foreign possibilities when planning for the postwar holidays.

It is a fact, of course, that some good work has been done in this direction by the establishment of holiday-saving schemes, for example. But a national campaign to develop this idea, a campaign that would make the people work harder and save money to join all the others who are going away for health-giving holidays, would not alone benefit the tourist industry but the country as a whole.

Better houses, better holidays, better health, might well become a national slogan.

Sunday Independent, 29 October, 1944

Ireland's Place In A Turbulent World

1944-11-12

The London Times honoured us of late by sending among us a Special Correspondent. His two articles on Ireland were quite friendly in tone. It is odd that his visit should have practically coincided with a revival at the Abbey of that amusing study of very different relations between the two countries from what now prevail "John Bull's Other Island." However much Shaw's play may have "dated," there is no doubt that the shrewd Irish dramatist did put his finger on one timeless truth. Every Englishman that thinks at all about Ireland—which of course, not many of them do is at heart akin to Mr. Broadbent. We Irish have a pathetically childish desire to know what other people think about us; but we are also cynical enough, on the whole, to realise quite clearly that what visiting foreigners say about us must always be taken with a good grain of salt.

Ireland is not easy to write about just at present. "There is a curious lull in the Irish political situation," says the *Times* Special Correspondent, and goes on to quote a former Minister, who, when asked of what the average Irishman was thinking, replied promptly: "Nothing." To the Englishman the greatest puzzle about us at the moment is, of course, our attitude to the war. He sees the reasons for that attitude very fairly indeed, and does not make the mistake of supposing it to be due to pressure from any one party or section. But one feels that he exaggerates both our remoteness and the uniqueness of the events of which we are the neutral spectators.

Our View Of War

The fact that our view of the war may not coincide at all points with that of the people actually waging it does not at all prove that we are without interest in what is happening or that we do not realise well enough its bearing on our own future. Indeed, however scanty our information—and its scantiness, too, may be easily exaggerated—it is quite possible that, like the proverbial hurler on the ditch, we can see the full meaning of current events more clearly than do the belligerents.

On the other hand, it is easier for us than for the combatant nations to escape the illusion that anything entirely unique is now taking place. All wars, it was remarked a very long time ago, seem unique to those engaged in them. By and large, however, we may well doubt whether the consequences of this particular war, terrible as they have been and are, will in the long run prove to be more revolutionary than those of the last. Of one thing experience, which is still, perhaps, more vivid with us than with those in whom it has been blurred by the second catastrophe, gives us fairly trustworthy assurance. This is that once the war is over, the return to "normal," in spite of all the destruction and dislocation so evident now, will be far more rapid and wholesale than many people who are obsessed by the magnitude of present events can imagine. In particular the phenomenon known as "war-psychology" will certainly wear away with surprising quickness. This is an important point for our future relations with our mighty neighbour. These relations, we should remember, will be for the most of the time after all not with Great Britain at war but with Great Britain at peace, the peace may not be the same as the last one, and quite possibly the change may be as much to our advantage as against us. In any case, the problems we shall have to deal with will not have more than very minor reference to the strains and stresses of the present war.

A Forecast

These considerations have a bearing on one rather tantalising forecast offered by the Special Correspondent. Speaking of our remoteness from "the enthusiasms and anxieties which

preoccupy virtually the whole of the civilised world,” he envisages the possibility that “almost alone in Europe, Eire is destined to remain a small pocket of the prewar world, a fact—which in years to come the tourist agencies might discover.” This picture of ourselves as a stationary community, preserved as it were under glass as a memorial of the twenty years from 1919 to 1939, is bizarre enough to be really entertaining. We are, of course, always a good way lag of the outer world in our reception of international movements and ideas. That has been remarked about us many times during many centuries. Though the more widely-travelled among us may in some ways regret our backwardness, it is also probable that this backwardness, or slowness of receptivity, is really rather good for us. It blunts the sharpness of the ideas when they ultimately do reach us. We are thus enabled to give them a special Irish twist which makes their assimilation less dangerous. In fact, a good many foreign ideas are apt to have lost what sense they ever had by the time they reach this outer island, and so to be received by us not as ideas at all, but just as meaningless adornments to our never-ending conversations.

Many years ago the late Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson incorporated in one of his strange prophetic novels a similar notion about Ireland. Being a priest, he naturally saw his vision in ecclesiastical colours. His Ireland of the future was to be one huge monastery, to which the tired busybodies of the great totalitarian world beyond would periodically retire for rest and contemplation. It is at least cheerful to know that both these forecasts conceive of our island as in some way or other a place of quiet and repose in a turbulent world. We may, at any rate, enjoy the feeling that these English observers are impressed by the restfulness of our lives, while carefully concealing from everyone but ourselves the bitter truth that we are not at all as quiet as we look.

Sunday Independent, 12 November, 1944

Our Farmers' Wives Are Not Race Of Foreign Beauties!

1944-11-19

To judge by the volume of letters it has called forth, the recent discussion on this page about the lot of the farmer's wife has given many people furiously to think. Unfortunately, we had not space to publish more of the letters, but here are some thoughts suggested by the correspondence.

Too many people—rustic and city folk alike—seem to leave out of sight what is surely the governing consideration in this question as to whether or not the farmer's wife is overworked or ill-treated; that is, that even yet, with all the restrictions and compulsion the war has brought, the Irish farmer is one of the very freest men in the world.

Poor he may often be, though some of us who live in the towns would be glad if we could exchange for his alleged poverty what he is inclined to envy as our affluence. But there is no doubt at all that as far as the regulating of his own life is concerned, he is in a position to do just what he likes.

And if he is free, so is his wife. Women are not the slaves of their husbands, and if there is anything very wrong with their treatment the remedy is in ninety-five per cent of the cases in their own hands.

The woman who can't make her husband in the long run do what she wants him to do is not a social problem—she is a case for a psychiatrist. If the wives of Irish farmers are dissatisfied with their lot, it is up to themselves to do something about it.

Training Her Sons

Even in the odd case where the farmer's wife is too much afraid—or too fond—of her husband to make him do what she wants in order to improve her standard of living, she can at least help the good cause by training her sons so that they will treat their wives properly.

One would imagine, from some of the letters that have come in on the subject, that our farmers' wives were a race of foreign beauties imported in special cages. After all, most, if not all, Irish farmers are the sons of farmers' wives. Let nobody try to tell us that mothers, even in these queer times, have no control over their children. The first ten or so years are the years when a man's whole character is formed. If he grows up into the kind of bad-mannered and selfish brute that some correspondents declare our farmers to be, then the main fault lies with his mother.

Nobody in Church or State, not even the father himself, can stop mothers from being the main influence on their children's minds. If our farmers' wives have grievances against their husbands, let them make sure that their own daughters-in-law won't have the same grievances.

The point about farmers being free is all-important from a different angle. Everybody knows that life is often made harder than it need be for the good women of our countryside because of the lack of certain common amenities in their homes. There is a kind of suggestion going about that these amenities ought somehow to be provided by the State.

The less of this task the State undertakes the better it will be both for itself, the farmer, and, not least, his wife.

Live Like Free Men!

There is a sad lack of sanitation and a great need for a good water-supply in our country districts. Farmers and their wives have all our sympathy in the inconveniences they suffer. What we cannot help asking, however is this: What is there to prevent every farmer from

installing a quite good and sufficient sanitary system in his own house or from getting himself built a serviceable concrete tank for rain-water, and keeping it so that the water may be fit for use? Even if the labour or cost of building sanitary conveniences for himself is beyond the small farmer, there are excellent and very cheap devices on the market for this purpose for years. There is nothing except lack of sense and energy to prevent every farmhouse at present from having a bath installed.

But instead of making or otherwise providing these things for themselves our farmers—and their wives—seem to have a tendency to sit back and complain because the Government are not providing them for them.

Apart from the cost of any such provision to the taxpayers in general, it would have the really serious drawback that it would deprive the farmer of the very thing he ought to value above all other things except his religion—his freedom.

Let no one, man or woman, proceed to scoff at that freedom, as it is sometimes fashionable for people to do who do not know what they are talking about. It is often suggested nowadays that four square meals and a free suit of clothes is a good bargain for human liberty. Convicts don't think so, on the whole.

If our farmers do not stand up like men and live their own lives in their own way—and this applies even more for their wives—they may not feel the time coming when they won't be much better than convicts in their own State-provided, State-lighted, State-watered, and State-sanitated houses.

Sunday Independent, 19 November, 1944

Sense Of Proportion Is Important

1944-12-03

A sense of proportion used to be regarded as the main prop of character and intelligence [...] values have fluxed and [fallen] in a world where gate-[...]ng and overwhelming a[...]ance publicity are the password to much of the apparent success. In the new set of values, swift rather than careful thinking is the cry, and the prize often goes to the noisiest instead of to the most skilled. Here at home there is painful evidence of the exploitation of undigested statements, smash-and-grab argument, and all the rest of the shapeless new technique. There is, for example, the case of “our great unexploited mineral resources.” The Government are indicted because they have not extracted our 20—or is it 200—million tons of coal from the yawning ground. There is also the talk of copper and iron and half a dozen other ores gaping at us and asking why, oh why, is Ireland so obtuse as not to pick up the wealth lying at its feet. Here is coal, the material that would solve all our fuel problems in a night, if only our governors would stoop to conquer with pick and drill.

On the ancient classical stage there was what was known as dramatic irony, by which the principals in the play were represented as being without knowledge of implications of the plot to which the audience were privy through the chanting of the chorus. In Ireland our national dramatic irony is at once simpler and more complex than that. With us, in the first flush of presumptive knowledge, the irony lies in the fact that too often we don't know that we don't know what we are talking about. And so long as our system of education remains unchanged we shall remain handymen of thought and tinkers of method like that.

But let us get back to the coal and the iron and draw the attention again of the critics to a little document that the Government published only last year, and which, if read, would have cancelled out in advance all this 1944 demand for underground miracles. The name of it is “A Short Review of Irish. Mineral Resources.” The author is D. W. Bishopp, A.R.S.M., M.Inst-M.M., P.G.S. It is published by the Stationery Office at 9d. Rapidly let it speak for itself in extracts:—

“Ireland's mineral deposits have been closely studied for a period of over 100 years.”

“It is not sufficient to have a probable reserve of some millions of tons of coal in the ground; it must be economically extractable and of suitable quality.”

“The ultimate value of a coal is the heat that is got out of it. A coal with high ash and low calorific value is not necessarily of practical use.”

“Our capital in the form of the coal that remains to us is too securely locked up by Nature to permit of its immediate liquidation.”

So much for the high hopes of a great coal-getting drive!

Note Of Caution

Mr. Bishopp examines the case for other metallic and non-metallic ores in Ireland. He is not without hope of future new scientific methods of discovery, but he is cautious:—

“The limitations of the present known resources of Ireland are fairly clear, but there is still some possibility that other mineral deposits may be discovered. The probability of this happening through a further study of the surface is not great, since superficially the ground has been examined far more carefully than in some of the younger countries, and practically all of Ireland has been geologically mapped on the scale of 6” to the mile.”

Large areas covered by bog or glacial drift are however, now being examined by geophysical methods involving electric, radio and other reactions, and out of this luck may come.

But meanwhile the little ninepenny book of reservations which has remained unread by the multitude is a reminder of the oceans of optimistic bunkum we all love to sail over to the port of Nowhere.

Sunday Independent, 3 December, 1944

Are We Serious About Abolishing Partition?

1944-12-10

Twice, during the past few weeks the Taoiseach found occasion to repeat that there is among all our people a constant sincere, and, indeed, ardent desire for the unity of the whole country. On one of the two occasions he added that there are differences of opinion as to how unity may be won, and, on the other, he invited “any party which felt that it had any suggestion which would assist in that direction” to bring its proposals forward.

It does not really seem as if the Taoiseach himself or his own party had very much to offer in the way of suggestions. Would it be too flippant to propose that the problem be made the subject of a prize competition, the prize to be really substantial, and the age of the competitors to be above twenty-one? At least this might produce a few ideas on a subject on which at the moment all Ireland seems singularly barren.

So far from there being differences of opinion as to how unity may be won, it looks rather as if in cold fact there weren't any opinions at all—unless the Taoiseach means that there are some people who think force ought to be used and others who don't. The first essential to any kind of sanity is to recognise that there is no room for anything that can be reasonably called “opinion” at that level of discussion.

A Questionnaire

Perhaps, for the sake of mere argument, we may be permitted to get further down to fundamentals even than the Taoiseach got. We do so, as the schoolmen used to say, by denying his major.

There is little real evidence of this ardent desire for unity of which he spoke.

What evidence is forthcoming is rather to the contrary. At a Sunday night's Question Time on Radio Eireann, one of the questions was: “Which Ulster counties return deputies to Dáil-Eireann?” One competitor who made a stab at it could only name two, and one of the two he named was Armagh. To judge from the reception his answer got, it looked very much as his curious ignorance was widely shared by his audience in the hall where the competition was held.

Surely the first requisite for an ardent desire for something is that one should be able to name what one desires.

There was a minor French poet once who wrote a poem about the awfulness of being madly in love and not knowing what you are in love with. Is his sinister fate shared by a large number of Irishmen who ardently desire unity with the Six Counties of Ulster, but cannot say which counties of Ulster the six are? As a logical preliminary to the competition we have suggested, perhaps a questionnaire might be sent out to find how many of our citizens can pass this simple test. If it did nothing else, it would at least bring home to us all the existence of one political question in regard to which some elementary knowledge is necessary, as distinct from strong feelings.

Nationalist Areas

Recently the “Evening Herald” contained a very interesting interview with Mr. Lindsay Keir, Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University, Belfast, who is chairman of a body called the Northern Ireland Planning Advisory Board. This body has, it seems, recently issued a report in which are recommended measures to prevent the drift from the country into Belfast. The situation in the Six Counties is very similar to our situation in this part of Ireland. There was an increase of 23,184 in the total population there between the two last census-years. Of this increase 98 p.c. was in Belfast alone. The report envisages “the industrialisation of the Six Counties at large,” and suggests that special measures are necessary in the case

of Tyrone and Fermanagh, neither of which has a town of much more than 5,000 people. Incidentally, these are the two counties where there is a very definite Nationalist majority, as there is in Derry City, South Down and South Armagh.

The suggestion that these counties should be subjected by the Unionist Government in Belfast to a policy of planned industrialisation (presumably with English financial backing) gives food for thought on the part of Eire citizens. Such a policy, if feasible at all, would mean, and would be planned to produce, a rapid growth of population, fed by transfer of workers from England, as has happened already in the case of Belfast, Larne, Lurgan, and Lisburn. A very short time might be sufficient to bring about a radical change in the proportion of Nationalists and Unionists, to the disadvantage of the former.

Planning Ahead

Perhaps there is some little consolation for us in the Board's view, expressed by Mr. Keir, that such beauty-spots as the Glens of Antrim might be "sterilised against industrial development." Whether or not there is anything solid behind the Board's proposals as a whole, they are very interesting as showing how intelligent Unionist opinion is moving, and what possibilities of action may lie before really influential and really ruthless planners. They show, too, this time by contrast, how poverty-stricken in our thinking about the Northern problem we in the South have been during the past twenty years, and still are.

As a community we have been very little above the level of the person who thinks deputies from Armagh sit in Dáil Eireann.

Between the Treaty and the Boundary Commission we did have a special bureau for the study of Ulster history, economics, population-trends, and such questions. The furore over the Boundary Commission killed this bureau, but not before it had printed a valuable, and now very rare, handbook of the Ulster question, with maps and tables. Since then we have had our famous plan to make the Twenty-six Counties a self-sufficient economic unit, which has probably struck a more fatal blow for the perpetuation of the Border than any other single event in our time. Finally, we have had our clever series of constitutional changes, which leave it beyond the wit of Mr Oliver Flanagan, TD., to know whether we are in or out of the British Commonwealth.

"Dangerous Game"

Presumably the Taoiseach would hotly deny that these large questions of policy have anything at all to do with Partition, which must be considered entirely in the abstract. The next few years are likely to demonstrate that, in politics, that kind of dealing in abstractions is a dangerous as well as a futile game.

Hardly any item of political policy is unaffected by other items, and this is particularly true about Partition.

If we really meant what we say, the ending of Partition would dominate all our other policies, and every one of them, down to the Tourist Traffic Bill, would be specially related to our plan for finally abolishing the Border.

For over twenty years we have acted as if the Border were not there, and the result has been to make it more permanent than most of our people in 1922 ever thought it would be. Has the time not come for a change, not merely of tactics, but of principle? Should we not begin by realising as a *fact* that there are no Armagh deputies in Dáil Eireann? Having done so, we might set out seriously to study the causes of this queer phenomenon, especially those causes for which we are ourselves responsible. Their removal should surely be the first plank in any anti-Partition platform.

Sunday Independent, 10 December, 1944

Drawing Northern Irish Youth Closer To Great Britain

1944-12-17

The publication of the Northern Ireland Government's White Paper on Educational Reconstruction has aroused much interest in the Twenty-Six Counties, from two aspects. In the first place, it gives rise to the sad reflection that the divergencies between the two systems, already wide enough since the Northern Education Act of 1923, are going to be made still wider. Next to religion, nothing unites people so much as uniformity in educational experience; and in modern times the general culture of any community is more and more coming to be dominated by the work of its schools, both primary and secondary. The new scheme, following closely as it does on the lines of recent English reforms, is sure to play a considerable part in drawing the young generation of Northern Irish citizens into closer similarity with the youth of Great Britain. There is, of course, no need to be unduly alarmist about the immediate effects of this process. The new schemes will be slow in starting and long-distant in operation. None the less, they will undoubtedly add a course or two to the already too-high barrier which so tragically separates us from our Northern fellow-countrymen.

We must note and regret this aspect of the White Paper proposals. They certainly make more obviously urgent the need for a clear-headed and coherent policy on our part about the whole question of partition.

Second Aspect

The second aspect of the proposals is the headline they may perhaps be thought to set for us to follow. It is true that there are many people—and among them some who ought to know better—who are entirely complacent about our present system of education. Such people are perfectly satisfied that our present Minister is the best possible man to have charge of this most important Department of State, that he knows more about our educational needs than anybody else could know, and that the system he operates from Marlborough St. and Hume St. is so perfect as to need no improvement and call for no criticism. There are also, however, quite a few people who do not share in this extreme optimism. Even if not as vocal as they might be, these doubters have quite definite ideas. They see, for example, that this system, of which we are officially so proud, is really only the selfsame system that we took over from the British, with a few rather inappropriate patches plastered on it here and there, but also with a few alterations which, in their judgment, are very definitely not improvements.

The great defect of the old British system, which we have inherited and perpetuated, is its rigid division between primary and secondary education. This division has an origin which is not really very creditable. It springs from the fact that a century ago, when what is called primary education had its origin, it was thought that primary education was quite enough for the children of the poor. In England this idea was later carried even further, and a sharp distinction was made between the sort of institution required for the secondary education of the poor and the sort required for the rich. Hence the present rather pathetic controversy about the future of the public schools.

As far as Ireland was concerned the State only took a strictly limited interest at all times in secondary education. Perhaps this was just as well, for it permitted the growth of our voluntary secondary system, largely organised by the Church, which is excellent as far as it goes. The whole point is that, of course, it does not go nearly far enough.

The new English Act, and the Northern Ireland White Paper, have as their principal aim the provision of a free and complete secondary education for every child who can profit by it. As compared with this aim the rest of the proposals are largely of rather minor importance.

Some of them, indeed, are even questionable, such as the lowering of the compulsory school-going age to five and the raising of the leaving age to fifteen. The extension of State control involved in the whole scheme is also a very doubtful blessing, especially in view of the fact that the State is to exercise its control through a political Minister, for whom no educational qualification is thought necessary, and a highly centralised bureaucratic machine.

Must Not Lag Behind

These are grave drawbacks enough, but it still remains true that the great central aim of a much wider provision of free secondary education is a sound one. We in Eire can surely not afford to lag behind our neighbours in this respect.

If we allow ourselves to do so we shall certainly find ourselves subject in years to come to manifold penalties and disabilities.

There is no need for us to follow the English scheme in all its details. In fact, we should be most unwise to try to do so. This is not at all because the English scheme is so costly. In this respect the boot is on the other leg.

We cannot afford a cheap system of education; we must be prepared to spend more money, only taking care to spend it wisely, and to get for it what we need, not what some other community thinks it needs.

The true reason for not “keeping step with Britain” is that the British system of State-control and State-supervision does not suit our conditions. We have far too much of them already. What we need is a scheme for the subsidisation by the State of a secondary system which shall be free in all the good senses of the word—free to the deserving pupil and free to the school. Our great secondary schools should be so endowed that they can expand their work far beyond its present scope. They are already truly popular, with no suggestion about them of class distinction. They should be enabled to dispense also with all suggestion of financial privilege, so that the child of the poorest citizen, if he has the gifts, may climb right to the top of the educational ladder.

Sunday Independent, 17 December, 1944

And on On Earth Peace...

1944-12-24

You are a Christian? Of course you are. You practise Christianity. This may be the special season of peace and goodwill. But for you it means nothing different in that direction. For you have been a true Christian all the other days of the year.

You do not hate your brother, you are not intolerant. You have the badge of the early Christians which made the pagans cry out: "See how these Christians love one another!"

For you the law of charity is the supreme commandant of God.

"Thou shall love the Lord, thy God, with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

There is the summary of man's obligations to God and to other men. Being a Christian, a follower of Christ, you carry out those obligations.

But, alas! there are other men who are anti-Christian. Instead of working with love in their hearts, they work with hatred towards their neighbour, are seemingly happy when they have done him an injury.

Great minds, noble minds, do not stoop to such base conduct. Hear the voice of Abraham Lincoln: "With malice toward none, with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right." He will firmly defend the right, as God gives him to see it, but he will have charity, love, for all, including his opponents.

There is room for more charity in Ireland. An Irish Bishop recently deplored the policy of hatred abroad in the world. Let us see that it does not develop here. Let no man in any way injure or persecute his neighbour. Where men are true followers of Christianity they love one another.

This season of peace and goodwill is a time to ponder on these thoughts. Let us have no time for the protagonists of hate, no matter in what guise they may work.... "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of goodwill."

Sunday Independent, 24 December 1944

Growth Of Dublin And Belfast: A Problem

1944-12-31

The report of the Board of Inquiry into the Housing of the Working Classes in the City of Dublin indicates that this thorny old problem is still as far as ever from a solution. The report, unfortunately, deals only with conditions prevailing up to 1940. There can be little doubt that they have since grown very much worse. All the indications are that at the end of the present war the citizens of Dublin will be faced with deficiencies at least as grave as those that faced them in 1923—indeed graver, in so far as the population of the city had increased by 150,000 people between 1926 and 1936. Some figures will indicate the proportions of the problem.

Between 1922 and 1939 Dublin Corporation had built 13,000 new houses. Yet in the latter year something like 22,000 new houses were still needed to overtake the city's arrears; and this excludes the need for a regular annual provision of new houses to absorb the inevitable natural growth in population.

Over 8,000,000 Then

One little point made by the report is that the population of Dublin, which in 1936 stood at 468,103, had doubled in size since 1841.

When it is remembered that in 1841 the total population of Ireland was over eight millions, and that the huge growth of Belfast has taken place largely during the past century, the changes that have occurred can be grasped in their true character.

What used to be predominantly a rural people has become concentrated in ever-growing numbers in two big cities. These cities are situated on one coast, while the opposite coast area becomes progressively empty of people.

The chief characteristic of both cities is their enormous and apparently unconquerable slums. In 1938 there were 6,307 tenement houses in Dublin, housing 28,679 families with a total of 111,950 persons. A tenement is defined in the report as a house originally built for one family, in which more than one family now lives. Even if the figure in the report includes ordinary lodging-houses, it indicates a state of affairs which, cannot be described as admirable.

Other figures given by the report reinforce the same lesson. Up to 1938 28,679 families lived in 37,848 rooms in 6,307 tenement's giving an average of 1.34 rooms per family. Out of a total of 33,411 families 70 per cent. occupied one room each. The position as regards non-tenement dwellings was just as bad. In 1938 13,000 people were living in cottages which had been condemned as unfit for habitation.

Cottages V. Flats

The Board of Inquiry express a decided preference for cottages as against flats for the working classes. It is doubtful if the experience of the citizens with new cottage settlements like Crumlin is likely to support the Board in this view in the long run. Flats are unaccountably dearer to build than cottages, and their other disadvantages are faithfully enumerated in the Report. The disadvantages of cottage settlements are probably quite as great, if not greater. Distance from work, involving costly transport, overcrowding of a different but equally obnoxious kind, and, most of all, the appalling drabness of these huge agglomerations where the houses and the people are all of the same general type, are some of these drawbacks, which make themselves increasingly felt with the lapse of time.

One thing the Report ought to make perfectly clear, though it only touches it from a single angle:—Next to Partition, Ireland's biggest trouble is the huge size of Dublin.

Housing is only one of the ways in which the trouble makes itself felt. Everybody knows that if Dublin had been only half as big as it is, the difficulties created by the Emergency would have been proportionately less. Take fuel alone. If only the country districts and the smaller towns and cities had required to be supplied with a substitute for imported coal, how easily it could have been done! They are, in fact, largely self-sufficient already in this respect. The same applies to such other commodities as food and clothing. Dublin is the great trouble; the smaller towns and the rural areas can almost meet their own needs.

Hard To Control

Then again, its growth seems to defy all attempts at regulation or control. As in the case of housing, there have been many tribunals and commissions on town planning with Dublin, of course, as their chief concern. Their numerous reports are gathering the dust, while the city goes on growing, growing, growing. All appearances are that as soon as the war is over the same headlong, improvident, tasteless and wasteful expansion will begin again. Dublin could be one of the loveliest cities in the world. It need have no slum problem. There is nothing to prevent its being finely laid out in stately parks and squares, with worthy public buildings and adequate homes for its citizens.

Nothing, that is, unless the ignorance, apathy, and greed of the citizens themselves.

Here is a problem the elements of which are entirely within our own control. It differs from the Partition problem precisely in this respect, that we can solve it ourselves without saying "by your leave" or "with your goodwill" to anybody. It concerns not only Dubliners, but the whole country, if only because, as this report shows, the whole country will certainly be expected to pay something to solve it. Next to the all-important Partition question, it is one on which no political party should be absolved from having a clear and definite policy.

Sunday Independent, 31 December, 1944

The Newspapers Of The Future

1945-01-21

Members of the Publicity Club of Ireland heard interesting views during the week on “The Press of the Future.” A vision was conjured up of Great Britain being “invaded” by American newspapers and magazines after the war. And, of course, Ireland will be “invaded” too, not alone by the American but by the British newspapers as well, all out to beat one another in the circulation millions race.

It is fitting that the people as a whole should give some thought to what their newspapers of the future are going to be, for nowadays newspapers play a very big part in the lives of men and women.

There are, of course, newspapers and newspapers. What is one man’s favourite may be a rag to another man. Indeed, wives have been known to hate the favourite paper of their husbands and to insist on having the one they themselves preferred! All of which gives us a picture with a certain amount of freedom about it.

Closely Allied

And this again is fitting, because freedom and the Press are closely allied. The husband who would ban from the house his wife’s favourite morning or evening newspaper would be a bully: he would be narrow-minded; he would not give to others the freedom he enjoyed himself. There is always that danger where power is concerned.

There is always the danger that a Government may interfere with or ban a newspaper that it doesn’t like, seeking as a pretext some question of national safety.

Fortunately, we do not seem to be in any immediate danger of such action in this country. As a matter of fact, a very prominent member of the Government told a gathering of journalists some time ago that he welcomed criticism, and let it be understood that his colleagues also welcomed it.

Newspapers have great power today, and, therefore, human nature being what it is, it is not at all unlikely that petty-minded men in a Government would, in certain circumstances, be tempted to curb the freedom of newspapers which freely criticised them. Disraeli on one occasion referred to the powers of an author to influence world affairs, saying they were as great as those of statesmen. A book, he said, could be as great a thing as a battle.

Power Of Newspapers

What can modern newspapers be?

It was calculated in Great Britain before the war that there were millions of people who hardly read one book in a year, whereas nine-tenths of the people read a daily paper and over nine-tenths of them read a Sunday paper. Obviously, the newspapers have great power in carrying messages to the public.

Yet, in spite of that power, newspapers—and Irish newspapers in particular—seldom do anything that is hurtful to their own nation’s interests. Governments may at times feel keenly the lash of criticism, may long to gag a paper that is strongly censoring another country. But it must be remembered that any responsible newspaper voicing public opinion—not necessarily one hundred per cent, public opinion—has the right to set forth its views. Certainly, it has that right in a truly democratic country. Take it away and the people are left with a muzzled Press

“Invasion” Possibilities

A member of the Government who spoke at the Publicity Club of Ireland meeting referred to the position of small countries and also to the ideals of Ireland—ideals relating to the Irish language and culture. The Government wants to make Irish a living language here. Can it succeed if the other vision comes true, the vision of transatlantic aeroplanes daily and nightly unloading thousands of American newspapers and journals here, and of British aeroplanes doing likewise? That would have been an interesting line of thought for the Minister to discuss.

The power of the newspaper is so great that no sensible person will doubt that if the “invasion” we are promised takes place—and it probably will—a deep effect will be had on Irish life. Not necessarily, of course, in a year or two, but certainly in ten or twenty years.

Indeed, the position might easily be reached that, say, in Roscommon, where to-day we find Ireland’s football champions, or in Kerry, we might find the country’s soccer or baseball champions twenty years hence! This might be bad or it might be good. Given freedom of thought and discussion, views will probably differ about it. But it is a possibility that must be faced.

And about the newspapers of the future. There is no reason to think that, where the Irish papers met and beat outside competition in the past, they will fail to do so in the years ahead. Competition is good. The public should be assured of very interesting and informative papers.

Sunday Independent, 21 January, 1945

Dublin Is As English To-Day As It Was 30 Years Ago!

1945-01-28

“Dublin,” said Mr. Sean T. O’Kelly, at a meeting in Dun Laoghaire, “is almost as English as it was thirty years ago.” The remark would probably be highly ambiguous were it not for the fact it was made at a meeting of Combdháil Náisiúntá na Gaedhilge. Thirty years ago, one remembers with a shock, was 1915. What Mr. O’Kelly meant by “English” was, of course “English-speaking.” Otherwise it might be supposed that he was talking sarcastically.

Apart from the English language, which it speaks with an accent proper to itself and very unlike that of Oxford, few would maintain that the city is now, or was then, English to any very noticeable extent. Situated as it is, it naturally gives shelter at any particular moment to quite a considerable number of English visitors. Even the Lord Mayor of Belfast, who is probably not very like an Englishman, is reported to have come to Dublin for Christmas. But it would be just as correct to say that Le Havre or Boulogne was English ten years ago as it is to say that Dublin is English now or was in 1915.

American “English”

Too much can easily be made of this identity, or apparent identity, in language. If the songs they sing or the slang they use is any indication, Dublin’s children are far more American than English. Yet, if you listen to some American wireless programmes or try to read some American magazines, you may be surprised to find how foreign a tongue English can be. The English-speaking Connaughtman often finds it quite hard to understand the equally English-speaking man from Dunfanaghy or the Rosses.

Most native-born Dubliners could leave a Cork eavesdropper guessing if they put their minds to it and vice versa—decidedly, one thinks vice versa. In fact, it is very conceivable that Dublin and Cork would be mutually more intelligible in Gaelic League Irish than in their native English dialects.

It would be very wise for us all to realise fully that, for good or ill, English has become the native language of nine Irishmen out of ten; perhaps nine point nine would now be nearer the mark. If we revive Irish, that is what has to be changed, but it gets us nowhere at all to start the revival by pretending that it isn’t so. On the basis that English is not our native language, the language we learn from our mothers and begin to talk in our cradles, no change at all would appear to be necessary: the revival movement is superfluous.

Is it, after all, very surprising that Dublin should be as “English” now as it was the year before the 1916 Rising? The large number who spoke English then and are still alive can hardly be expected to have undergone so miraculous a change in the interval that they not only now speak Irish exclusively, but have forgotten all their English. The younger generation, who have been to school since 1922, have had so much compulsion applied to them, not merely to learn Irish, but to do sums in it, that it is to be feared they have grown a little callous.

Hardly enough allowance has been made in the whole Irish movement for poor, stubborn human nature. Only a very few people find it natural to be enthusiastic about what they have been made to learn in school, whether they have liked it or not. Considerable enthusiasm is required to induce most people to make such an effort as the constant speaking of Irish calls for. It is to be feared that perhaps the greatest effect of twenty-five years’ compulsion has been to give the general public a kind of tough and leathery skin on the subject of the Irish language. If this be so, it is little short of disastrous. Not only may it endanger the success of the revival movement as far as the speaking of Irish is concerned, but it may deprive

the language of the enormous educational value which it could have if treated with a little discernment.

Reasonable Reasons

Those who guide the language movement should try to keep constantly before their own minds and those of the public the good sound reasonable reasons there are behind it. They should not suggest, as they too often do, that the one valid reason for keeping Irish alive and extending its use is that it is necessary for us to have some language other than English. If that were the main purpose of the Irish drive, it would really be wiser for us to plump for French, which would probably come easier to most of us, as well as being really a more useful language.

The true reasons why we ought all to learn and speak Irish is that it is bound up with our history, that it is a lovely, if difficult, language, and that it contains enshrined in it a wealth of song and story, the loss of which to us and our children would be irreparable. That, and not mere rebelliousness, was what made Mr. O'Kelly and his contemporaries of thirty, forty, or fifty years ago enthusiastic Gaelic Leaguers. If to-day there is perhaps more Irish but less enthusiasm, may not the cause be that Irish has been divorced from liberty and poetry, music and song, and associated overmuch, with compulsion and with mathematics?

Sunday Independent, 28 January, 1945

Limerick Urged To Launch Out On Own

1945-02-04

The suggestion during the week that Limerick should have its own University College is a healthy sign of the times. Though it might seem that Eire is already sufficiently well stocked with universities, there is everything to be said for the view that they might be a little better distributed. Even Dublin people can hardly refuse to admit that Dublin, at any rate, has more than its fair proportion. Indeed, it is a little surprising that one very obvious question in that regard is never asked. Perhaps it is an indiscreet question, as well as being obvious. Why should one city have two big and entirely separate universities?

A little redistribution of our seats of learning, though it might, perhaps, be rather costly at the present stage of their development, would be very good for the whole country in the long run.

One bad effect of concentration in Dublin is that the metropolis, which is already too big for the country, is made still bigger every year by an enormous influx of students.

What we need is a reasonable growth in the population and standing of our smaller cities. Nothing gives a city such standing as a university of its own. There are other cities beside Limerick which are well placed to be university centres. Kilkenny is one, Waterford is another, Sligo is a third. Universities do more than support landlords. They also create various demands for services and amenities.

Above all, they spread an interest in literature, science and the arts, and thus diffuse civilisation, which in one way or another affects everybody who comes within their orbit of influence.

They require libraries and stimulate printers, not to speak of fostering theatres and cinemas. If we wish to improve on the smaller cities we could not do better than encourage them to found universities.

England And U.S.A.

It is very probable that one of the changes that will come to post-war England will be a considerable growth in the number of its universities and university colleges. Apart from Oxford, Cambridge and London, hardly any English seat of higher learning is over a hundred years old. Yet England is far behind the United States in the number of such institutions it possesses. Most of them are still comparatively quite small, but they have made, and are making, an enormous difference in English life. There is no really cogent reason why places like Waterford and Kilkenny should not have universities as well as Reading or Exeter or Southampton. They could be on a small scale at first, and indeed would not suffer greatly if they were to remain so permanently. Quality, not quantity is what universities ought to stand for.

Decentralisation

While the principle might thus be readily conceded, it is rather doubtful if anything would be gained by tying up a new college in Waterford with the National University.

From what one hears, that institution is already too cumbersome, if anything, and would certainly not gain by having another college added to its peculiar structure.

On the contrary, it is possible that progress now calls for the decentralisation of the National University and the full independence from each other of the Dublin, Cork and Galway Colleges. As separate universities, they would be in healthy competition with one another, and each would be able to pursue its own policy and set its own standards, leaving the country to judge between them. Quite probably, each would become famous for one or

more particular lines of study, and this would be facilitated if students were allowed free interchange.

It is a stimulating thought that Ireland might in time become a hive of free scholarship, encouraged by the existence of several independent and famous universities.

Making A Start

Those who are interested in the Limerick and Waterford projects should start on a modest scale and keep their independence from the beginning. A very interesting parallel for their guidance is afforded by the life-work of the late Dr. W. M. Childs, first President of Reading, who published a book called *Making a University*, twelve years ago. In it he describes how he turned Reading from a small agricultural annexe to Oxford into a full-fledged university with its own charter and endowments. He was greatly assisted by the munificence of the Palmer family. Limerick is not the seat of one of the biggest biscuit manufactories in the world, but it has its resources, and success would surely bring support. Instead of seeking for a ready-made foundation and for all that membership of the National University system implies, it would be for better for Limerick to launch out on its own. A really good centre for adult education in sociology, economics and political philosophy would make an impressive start. It need cost little and would require only modest premises, but it might one day grow into the University of Limerick.

Sunday Independent, 4 February, 1945

The Urge For Security Has Great Dangers

1945-02-11

Fashions are very strange things, and they are not confined to women's hats. They are just as active in the way men think as in the things men eat or wear. A hundred years ago it was the fashion in all civilised countries to set great store on what was called rugged individualism.

Men believed that their fortunes depended entirely on themselves, their own initiative, brains and activity.

It was the age of railway kings and cotton magnates, and these [...] did not go by hereditary right. They were won by toil and effort, by enterprise and skill, and were open to all men, whether or not their parents had been rich, and irrespective even of education.

The spectacle of the wealthy industrialist who had to work at all kinds of hard jobs from his early childhood was then not only familiar, it was a universal ideal. Smile's *Self Help* was read and recommended to aspiring youth. It is a book we are hardly able to read at all nowadays, but its author was highly praised and admired by no less a man than our own Charles Gavan Duffy for the headline he gave in it to all who sought fame and fortune.

The Self-Made Man

It is true that the self-made man has survived into this generation. Which of us is not familiar with his boast that he never got beyond the fifth book in the National School, and with his rather pathetic claim to a kind of mysterious superiority on that rather inadequate score? If he did but know it, he is really nothing more than the splendid survivor of a past age into a world which has changed out of recognition—as if you were suddenly to come upon a Brontosaurus in the midst of an Aberdeen Angus herd.

We have by now seen enough of the twentieth century to be able to recognise its essential character, the label that is probably going to mark it off among the other centuries in the gallery of history.

If its immediate predecessor was the century of Self-Help and the Self-Made Man, it is going to be the century of Security.

You may say if you like that two gigantic and almost universal wars have given it a singularly bad start in its predestined career. It is true that wars do not make people very secure. Notoriously, they do the exact reverse. But this very obvious fact only makes people all the more want to be secure—want it so eagerly and with such intensity that they make it into a kind of mystic ideal, just as the generation of Mr. Samuel Smiles did with that embodiment of its opposite, the Self-Made Man.

Ideal Of Security

The emergence of this ideal of security has been the most striking fact in the social history of the past twenty years. It did not have to wait for Sir William Beveridge. That astute and sensitive publicist had only to give name and form to something already vaguely but powerfully active in the public consciousness. Perhaps it was set going by the ups and downs of the 1920's—deflations and inflations, bumps and booms, starting with the chaos of post-war Europe and becoming even more general with the American crash of 1929, with Hatry, Krueger and Stavisky.

The upshot of all this economic unsettlement, culminating as it has done in the present war, is that men no longer hope, or even want, to make their fortunes. They no longer look upon the world as a testing-place offering golden opportunities for the strong, the enterprising, the clever and the lucky. They seek only a modest sufficiency, and the less

they are called upon to risk, to work, or even to think, in order to obtain it, the better its idea pleases them.

What is most serious and, in effect, most dangerous about this powerful urge towards security is that there is scarcely anything men do not seem ready to sacrifice in payment for its very problematical attainment. A century ago they were willing to let women work in mines like animals, and children be smothered to death in chimneys in pursuit of the then fashionable ideal of wealth and power for those competent to win them. To-day they are just as willing to throw away all freedom, initiative and independence and to become virtual paupers so long as they are guaranteed a weekly allowance by the State.

Banks And Railways

There are three great economic institutions which have set their stamp on the world now undergoing a rapid change. These are the limited liability company, the bank-cheque, and the railway. All are just about a hundred years' old. and all are being transformed under our eyes into something totally different from what they once were. What with Excess Profits Tax, Income Tax, Prices Control, Quotas, and Licences, the limited liability company is now liable to all sorts of pains and penalties of which its originators never dreamed.

There is a powerful drive to turn banks into State Institutions and bank-clerks into civil servants. This is the real meaning behind all the discussion about social credit of which we have heard so much; whether its advocates are fully conscious of it or not, the end of their propaganda, if it should ever be successful, will be that all overdrafts and loans must be granted by a branch of the Civil Service, with all the regulations, bye-laws, emergency and other powers and sanctions that this implies.

Sport Of "Kings"

A hundred years ago railway construction was the sport of railway-kings: we still hear echoes of its excitement in talkies about the Iron Trail. The kings and the aristocratic oligarchs who succeeded them have vanished from our railways as from our palaces. Their place, too, is to be taken by civil servants or beings as near civil servants as makes no matter. All this, we are told, has been done and is being done for the sake of the plain people. Many dreadful abuses have been certainly ended in the process, and if it could stop at the point it has now reached all might be well, especially if as we may hope, more importance is given to the comfort, convenience and safety of the people than to the sacrosanctity of the multitudinous new regulations. In time there may even be once more a reaction towards more reliance on the initiative and ability of the normal citizen to take care of himself and his family. If such a reaction ever does come, it's chances of success will depend on whether these admirable qualities have not been totally atrophied in the citizen by the over-zealous attentions of our new mother, the State.

Sunday Independent, 11 February, 1945

Don't Forget Our Scientists And Inventors

1945-02-18

It is probably one of the mysteriously beneficent dispensations of Providence that so few people realise to what an extent our whole lives are now dependent on inventions. We have got so used to living in an age of mechanical wonders that most of us are content just to go on enjoying what we receive and we never stop to think where it all comes from. Now and again, perhaps, we are startled by some all-too-brief announcement of what we owe to the Industrial Research Council, for example. We read a short paragraph in our newspaper, and it brings home to us the fact that if it had not been for the quick intelligence of a small number of nameless men—how many of us know even their names?—in Dublin, we should have to go without sugar or soap or even the reduced number of buses and motor cars that the emergency has so far spared us. Our wonder and admiration can only last a few minutes, and then we turn to the racing page or the latest results from Shelbourne Park or Harold's Cross

Perhaps if we did find it possible to let our minds dwell more on these wonders, the effect on us would be bad rather than good. We might easily become so anxious about our exciting situation, about these close shaves and hairbreadth escapes of which we are now blissfully unaware that we should find it difficult to go on with our own humble daily round. A world which concentrated too much attention on its inventors might find itself short on other things more essential still to our life and comfort.

40 Years Ago

Forty years ago it seems that the public mind was more easily stirred by the wonders of invention. Those were the days when H. G. Wells with his scientific romances had succeeded Jules Verne as one of the world's most popular authors. The pace of invention has grown so rapid and its results so omnipresent that we have become almost inured to them. There is even a certain danger that we are developing, if we have not already developed, a kind of spoiled child mentality about the amenities with which inventors have so richly endowed us.

Instead of being duly thankful for them and honouring their authors as they deserve to be honoured, we take them, perhaps, too much for granted and expect them to be continued in an indefinite progress without any effort, even of recognition, on our part.

It would surely be a healthy thing if we were told more at any rate about the devices which have done so much to make our lives tolerable for the past five years

Whenever honours and credits are being distributed hereafter to those who have deserved well of us during the present world-crisis we ought not to forget our scientists and inventors.

The Dark Side

Unfortunately, as we are all too painfully aware, invention has its dark side as well as its bright. Not only does it help enormously to prolong life and to lighten its burdens, it is also extensively used for destructive purposes. We hear a good deal about the most beneficial discoveries which have been made during the present war: penicillin is, perhaps, the best-known example out of quite a large number.

All these, however, are insignificant in comparison with the many new ways for killing and wounding that have been perfected during the same period. So obvious is the discrepancy that many thoughtful people are asking themselves whether on balance the whole extraordinary development has after all been worth while.

The question is really an idle one. Nobody can now call a halt to invention or to scientific discovery.

Both those who condemn these things and those who claim, as H G. Wells used to do, that they will produce a Utopia in which men will be like gods, are guilty of a foolish error of judgment. Science and invention are not intrinsically either good or evil. All depends on how they are used and directed. Scientists and inventors are neither fiends incarnate nor are they a new race of divinities. They are just human beings like the rest of us. What their genius gives us will be productive of good or evil according as we know how to use them well or ill, and that is a matter on which scientists themselves can give us no more direction than anybody else. What the whole modern world needs to realise is that it is a matter of morality: and the laws of morality are unaffected by science and inventor. There can be no more fatal delusion than the idea, far too prevalent in "modern" circles, that such things as the internal combustion engine have somehow caused us to "outgrow" these laws.

When Peace Returns

Pessimism in relation to scientific progress is in all probability only a by-product of the war. When peace is restored and life once again becomes pleasant, there is every likelihood of a return to an equally misplaced optimism. As always truth lies midway between the extremes. It is after all an exhilarating thought that invention and discovery have put into our hands the means to make our lives richer and fuller than it ever was possible for them to be before.

An admirable example is afforded by microphotography. Apart from its wonderful possibilities in regard to medicine, it promises also to bring about as great and as beneficent a revolution in our daily lives as did the art of printing itself.

An American librarian has lately published a plan by which, with its help, a book of 250 pages can be printed on the back of a three-by-five-inch catalogue card. This will enable whole libraries to be fitted into an ordinary desk drawer, and the machines for reading such cards can be produced more cheaply than typewriters.

The value of a widespread library movement is more and more recognised in all civilised countries. Here is an invention which promises to bring all the world's best books within reach of the poorest student in the most remote country town. All that is needed in order to realise its potentialities for good is the determination not to waste it for trivial, indifferent, or positively immoral purposes. It rests with ourselves to decide whether or not we still value the great virtue of contemplative knowledge without which all such miracles of invention will prove to be Dead Sea fruit.

Sunday Independent, 19 February, 1945

Information Wanted Please

1945-02-25

A matter which is of very great importance to the public generally was raised at a recent meeting of the Co. Limerick Committee of Agriculture. It was complained that, owing to the absence of the Press from a food conference held a short time ago under the [auspices] of the Department of Agriculture, a one-sided report of what took place was published. Many important questions, it was stated, were put to the Minister at the conference, but to these no publicity at all was given, with the result that the public were allowed to form no idea of what might be called the unofficial side of the discussion.

It is to be feared that the practice referred to—of excluding the Press from such important conferences between the Government or its spokesmen and the representatives of the [people] has grown very considerably in recent years, not only in Dublin, but provincial centres too. Local [officials] clothed with a new [“authority” too] often try to tell the people only what they (the officials) think [they] should know, and not what the [people] want to know and have a right know.

The People’s Business

It ought to be fairly well recognised by this time that without [...] and effective publicity democratic government becomes a dead [...]. The apparatus can, of course, [...] in being and even be made to perform a whole series of elaborate and complicated motions.

But unless the people, or at least an effective proportion of them understand and are interested in what is happening, these motions might as well be the flappings and gyrations of a scarecrow in the wind.

What the machine was made for is to do the people’s business, and to do it not only in the most efficient way, but also with the maximum co-operation on the people’s part. There is far too much of an idea in the minds of those who tend the machine that it exists not for the sake of the people but for the sake of the government.

Real Interest Ignored

Now, governments are, in the nature of things, almost always made up of party politicians.

Such politicians are not in every case disinterested and competent.

If they are not disinterested, a good thick veil of secrecy may enable them to look out for their own personal or party advantage while neglecting the real interest of the people. If they are incompetent, the same cloak enables them to cover up their own glaring deficiencies. In this second case there is also the constant danger that their officials may use them as instruments to carry on a policy or policies with which the public, who are, of course, the people most concerned, would never agree if they knew anything about them.

We Irish are not at all the politically inexperienced nation we have so often been called. But it is true that our experience, while indeed intensive, has so far been very one-sided. We have made an exemplary success of agitation, organisation, and struggle against outside rule. What we lack as a people is knowledge of the positive technique of government. We are democrats to the backbone, but so far it may be doubted if we have shown many signs of knowing how to translate our strong democratic feelings and ideas into a steady democratic practice.

The critics who sourly accuse us of not being too sure of the exact line between democracy and demagoguery have some shred of right on their side.

If we knew, for instance, more about the long experience of continental countries, we should never be willing to make light of the danger to us as a community and often even as individuals, of a combination of incompetent or interested politicians and an overzealous

bureaucracy. The history of Europe is strewn with tragic examples of the disasters such a combination has brought on one people after another.

Our greatest protection against such dangers—in fact against all possible political and social dangers of which we are going to be threatened with plenty—is *information*.

The fuller our information about all public questions, and the more vigorous our discussion of them, the safer we shall surely be in the long run.

For a short time it may seem to pay the people well enough to shut their eyes and trust some political wonder-worker or veiled prophet who claims to have some mysterious information which enables him to walk in his sleep, and to guide them along a tight-rope while in the same condition. There is nothing surer than that, if they let themselves be deluded into taking this short-cut to political or social comfort as their main highway, they will end by going over a cliff.

Much At Stake

More is at stake even than the mere form of democratic government. Our whole existence as a free people may be involved.

A free Press is indispensable to democracy. Great crimes against the people and their interests may be committed by men who arrogate to themselves the right to let the public know only what they think it is “safe” to publish in the newspapers.

Sunday Independent, 25 February, 1945

Will Women Of France Give A World Lead?

1945-03-04

The news that for the first time in history the women of France are to have votes in the forthcoming parliamentary elections comes strangely enough to us in Ireland.

We have grown so accustomed to women voters that we scarcely think of them as having any different point view from their husbands or sons, fathers or brothers. When Ireland secured the recognition of her independence the cause of "votes for women" was already won. Not merely was it taken for granted as part of the electoral system which we set up here on the British model, but the Sinn Féin movement in which women were very prominent, had advocated it even before it was conceded in Great Britain.

Many people remember the excitement women were causing just before the war of 1914-18:

Rioting in the streets of London, chaining themselves to railings outside the Palace of Westminster, tussling with the police, and in general creating such a formidable rumpus that it was supposed to be second only to the Irish Home Rule agitation in making the Kaiser believe the British could never go to war.

Time Alters Views

Whether he did believe so or not, at any rate people had other things to think of after 1914. The war made an end of a great age in which people were constantly being shaken to their very souls by controversies about subjects which in retrospect often seem singularly trivial. Sometimes the suggestion is made that women's suffrage was one of these subjects. Has it really made any particular difference that they slipped into full citizenship almost without knowing it at the end of the last war? By the time the long-fought-for event had happened, they had been so harrowed by bloodshed and suffering that they were just a little bored with the thought of voting. At any rate they brought no new breath of life into politics. When the reaction came with the cynicism of the 1920's they were quite as blasé as their male relations, or else they, too, read *All Quiet on the Western Front* and shared the inconsequent pessimism of the time. Very few of them even thought it worth while to stand for election; those who did were obviously not the harbingers of a new era of femininity in politics, but rather (with a handful of exceptions) the old guard of a movement which had lost its meaning with victory.

In Ireland

Even here in Ireland, where women had no need to put up any fight for their rights, it is generally agreed that they have been by no means forward in using them. With our peculiar gift for giving our own special Irish twist to borrowed institutions, we have shown a tendency to elect women not as representatives of a hitherto unrepresented sex but rather as the bearers of names already well-known.

Psychologists assert that while men tend to be specialists in whatever they work at, women are universal amateurs. This difference in mental make-up may well go back to the early age of the world, when the man's job was to hunt and gather food, while the woman minded the children and kept the home fire burning in the family cave. Having a single, if often arduous, task to perform, men naturally developed a special skill in its performance. Women's work was even then more various than men's, and it was particularly necessary for them to acquire a capacity for ready improvisation.

Men tend to reduce all activity to a series of carefully-framed and sometimes quite irrational rules, which they often continue to follow when their meaning, if they ever had

any, has been entirely lost. If there is anything in this distinction, the advent of women into politics should really be the god-send the “suffragettes” so vehemently promised it would be. They should be the triumphant enemies of all bureaucracy, as well as being the sworn foes of war. They should bring into political life some of the spirit of compromise, of ready and genial improvisation, and of original and incalculable personality which notoriously distinguishes them in the home.

Has Made No Change

There is general agreement that, one at least of the roots of all evil in democratic or parliamentary politics is undue professionalism. What started as a very varied and undulating sort of family game, in which there were very few rules (and in which, be it noted, women, though voteless, were far more influential than now) has become an elaborate *Sitzkrieg* fought by highly organised big battalions in the shape of parties whose members become more and more marked off from the rest of the community.

So far, the coming of women into the field in numbers has done nothing to change the nature of the warfare.

They have merely voted for and joined the existing parties—taken up their positions, so to speak, with the old-fashioned political armies along the old lines. Are the psychologists wrong after all, and is that rather charming concept of the universal amateur just an empty generalisation?

There is another and a more hopeful possibility. It is that there has not yet been enough time for women to show their real powers in politics. The first generation of ‘suffragettes’ made the great, if perhaps not unnatural mistake of not only claiming women’s due share in public life, but also trying to set exactly the same share as the men. They even went so far in their folly as to dress like men! The second generation, for various reasons, has not yet found its feet. Much to men’s surprise, women did not show any great inclination to crowd into public life at all. On the contrary, they rather drew back, content in their strength, in spite of a certain rush into various underpaid employments, on the family and the home.

This only proves that they know where their strength really lies.

Perhaps the women of France, in so many ways a model to the world, will now show that they are capable of using their feminine gifts so as to restore to politics some of its old personal, amateurish, unregimented quality, some of that freedom of which male professionalism has done so much to deprive it.

Sunday Independent, 4 March, 1945

Learning from the Ascendancy!

1945-03-11

As the war seems to draw to its end we are beginning to hear of great schemes for post-war development, especially in building. Sooner or later the present shortage of building materials will be [relieved], and then we may expect a further big expansion to the built-up area of Dublin.

There are many people who [think] that the “development” of [this] kind which took place after the last war was by no means all praiseworthy. Neither private builders nor public authorities, [...] critics feel, were as careful as they might have been about the [lay]out, design, appearances and [...] of the many “schemes” which filled up once open areas [around] the city.

Thirty years ago there was [frequent] complaint of the way in which Dublin County outside the [...] was cut into rigidly enclosed [...] surrounded by those high [...] which even then seemed like [...] of a fabulously distant past [...] labour was to be had for for next to nothing. To-day a great many of those prim enclosures are gone, their walls thrown down, their trees and hedges uprooted.

It can scarcely be maintained that the substitution for their exclusive spaciousness of close-packed and often monotonous suburban villas has been in all cases an ideal improvement.

Backward Dublin

To anyone who visited the Continent during the inter-war years the backwardness of Dublin in regard to the aesthetic aspects of [...] suburban development was a [...] revelation. Cities like Dresden and Cologne, for instance—[...] reduced to shapeless masses of ruins—were almost as well worth seeing for the beauty of their new suburbs as for the glory of their monuments of past grandeur. Even in Rome, where the contrast between old and new presented perhaps the most difficult of all problems to the modern builder much was done to revive the ancient splendour of the city’s centre. We may perhaps console ourselves with the feeling that Dublin did on the whole at least as well as Belfast, and that much of the new building in London was a decided disimprovement on what it replaced. The consolation is a feeble one for it only amounts to a fresh assurance that in this, as in so many other respects, we have done little enough to justify the freedom for which we claimed so much when it was denied us.

There is not so far any very clear prospect that things are going to be much better after this war when building begins once more.

Especially is this the case in regard to public buildings and the adequate provision of well designed and suitably-located public parks, squares, and other open spaces.

There have, it is true, been rumours of a new palatial City Hall, but little has been heard of them in recent months; and the rumour of a new Catholic Cathedral is still more evanescent.

Government Buildings

It seems to be unquestionably settled that the Oireachtas and the Government must remain forever in their present cramped and ungainly quarters, with Government Buildings and Leinster House connected by alleyways and passages through the Museum and with access to the public between Kildare St. and Merrion Square by way of Leinster Lawn permanently blocked.

The new Ministry for Industry and Commerce facing Kildare Place is fine enough in its rather bare and massive way, but its proportions are lost in its narrow surroundings.

Apart from the enterprise shown so unexpectedly in its erection, the policy seems to be for Government offices to spread everywhere in dingy old buildings over the city.

Sad Reflection

It must be a sad enough reflection for any Irish Nationalist that the Ascendancy of the eighteenth century did far better in the way of architecture than our more native and more democratic regime has done, or shows any signs of doing. Whatever may be said of the rulers of Ireland between 1750 and 1800—and for most of the time, as rulers, they did leave much to be desired—at any rate they not only gave us a capital city of which we can be vicariously proud, but they covered the country with what in any other country would be called palaces. We just called them Big Houses, and when we got the chance began to pull them down.

There are a few, perhaps, among us who feel silently ashamed about Coole House; but the destruction has not stopped there, and one still sees advertisements in which dignified country mansions are offered for sale as possessing a “high demolition value.”

Someone lately complained that the banks have been spending on their offices money that would be far better spent on schools, libraries, and town and village halls. The indictment might have real force if there were much sign that the money, if available, would ever be so spent! If Dublin had a real plan for a new Government centre, a new library, a whole series of new museums, and a new university building, accompanied by a further plan for the proper lay-out of all new housing schemes with open squares, parks, fountains, ornamental gateways, and the other amenities which the Ascendancy knew how to provide, we might well adopt, a severer attitude towards commercial institutions. Till that time comes we have left ourselves very little right to criticise anyone for building anything he pleases

Sunday Independent, 11 March, 1945

St. Patrick's Day: Some Reflections

1945-03-18

Having duly celebrated our National holiday, it may be good for us to meditate on some of its aspects.

The whole idea of a “national holiday” is, of course, quite modern. Formerly St. Patrick's Day was a purely Church festival, and its [...] and political associations date at earliest from the 18th century. Incidentally, is it not rather a pity we do not make more than we [=do of our other Saints—Colm Cille, Columbanus, and the numerous [...men] who “travelled abroad for Christ's sake” during our Golden Age. In spite of the labours of scholars, the public at large still know singularly little about these men who first made the name of Irishman (or rather Scot, as Irishmen were then called) famous throughout Europe. Certain of them are much better known on the Continent than they are in the homeland they left. Perhaps this is what they would wish for: but it reflects [...] credit on us. At least we ought to have available for students some kind of collected edition of such works of theirs as are extant.

St. Patrick himself, like many other distinguished Irishmen, was, of course, a foreigner. Fifty years ago or so a fierce dispute was [raging] about his birthplace; Gaul, Scotland and Wales were all [claimants] to the honour, and at one time, to judge by certain old books, Scotland seems to have been the favourite. Later on, the decision of scholars was given in favour of Wales, and for about twenty years the dispute seemed comfortably settled. Unfortunately the peace was only a smothered war, because recently it has been asserted on high authority that even if there was only one birthplace there were two St. Patrick's—Old Patrick and Young Patrick—and that if one of them came from Wales, the other came from Gaul. It is all rather like the sort of thing that happens when an amateur plumber tries to mend a leak in a water-pipe. No sooner has he patched it up in one place than it bursts out again in another. We must now wait in patience for someone to start a fresh move in favour of Scotland.

Conversion Task

Whatever be the rights and wrongs of this academic dispute, it is sure enough for ordinary purposes that at least one St. Patrick did come here from South Wales as near the year of Our Lord 432 as makes no matter, and that he did begin the conversion of the Irish to the Christian Faith.

We should be ready to recognise that the full task of converting our ancestors must have been a slow one. If our present habits of mind are any indication, the Irish are not very easily converted to anything; and perhaps we may add, a little maliciously, that being a foreigner is rather a help, if you do want to set about getting them to change their stubborn minds.

St. Patrick was one of a long line of great men who have come here from abroad, or have been the sons of foreign fathers and Irish mothers, and have changed the course of our history. In fact, such men have probably, on balance, been more influential over our thoughts and actions throughout the centuries than have men of purely native birth. Blessed Oliver Plunket was, for example, a Palesman, of English extraction. Dean Swift was entirely English, connected with Ireland only by a single generation's residence here. Henry Grattan and Wolfe Tone were Palesmen, but, of course, by their time the Pale had gone West nearly to the Shannon. Parnell was American on his mother's side and of English extraction on his father's. Patrick Pearse's father was an Englishman. The list might be greatly prolonged.

If He Arrived Now

Suppose St. Patrick were to return among us in the year 1945, would he find us incredibly altered? Naturally he would not be familiar with all the modern inconveniences with which we are encumbered—wireless, the cinema, and what we have left of railways and motorcars. There is one thing at any rate he would know probably of much about as we do, and it is the *mainspring*, so to speak of all our works. His father was a town councillor in a Roman town in Britain, and probably his chief responsibility as such was to see that the taxes were duly paid.

Our way of doing public business, our essentially urban outlook, our tendency to reduce all life to rules and systems, is only a [remote] development of the Roman town-life which was just beginning to break down in Britain when St. Patrick was carried off to slavery among the Irish. If he were to come back, he would find much more among us to remind him of his father's town than he would of the Ireland of Niall of the Nine Hostages. We have become more British than the British themselves.

Sunday Independent, 18 March, 1945

Dublin's Disgrace

1945-03-25

An article entitled: "Slum Clearance: Past and Future," by Dr. T. W. T. Dillon, in the current issue of *Studies*, makes sad and shameful reading for the Dublin citizen. It is based on the recent Report of a Government Tribunal on the housing of the working classes. The findings of the Tribunal have been given wide publicity, but there are so many such reports nowadays that after a week or two they are easily forgotten.

This is one report which nobody in the least concerned should be allowed to forget.

Dr. Dillon's able and striking analysis, reinforced by the comments of an authority who is clearly familiar with every detail of the question, should serve to jog our memories and awake us to the realisation of an intolerable state of affairs. There is, of course, little that the ordinary citizen can directly do about this or any public matter. Our version of democracy is so fixed that we can only make our views decisively felt once every five years. But at least we have the power of making ourselves heard. We should keep on creating a thoroughly loud and disagreeable row about the slums until those who can do something wake up and do it.

Worse Than Years Ago

What emerges with appalling clarity from the report and from Dr. Dillon's article is that **Dublin's slums are worse now than they were in 1913.**

This in spite of the enormous sums the ratepayers have been forced to contribute for years back to finance an alleged attempt to end the disgrace and the menace to the city that they constitute!

What are the causes for this truly scandalous state of affairs?

Even a brief study of the article referred to is enough to make the most lighthearted citizen clearly aware of them. First comes the fact that regulations regarding overcrowding and the clearance of insanitary or otherwise unfit dwellings, which a Departmental Committee urged should be stringently enforced as long ago as 1914, have never been so enforced.

In 1938 there were close on 65,000 persons living in such dwellings—the population of a good-sized city in themselves. The excuse always given for this amazing slackness is that the closing and reconditioning of tenements and cottages would "cause intolerable hardship to the tenants." As Dr. Dillon points out, this excuse has been completely deprived of any validity it ever had by the Corporation's own recent reconditioning of Lower Gardiner St.—work which is costing the citizens two or three times as much now as it would have cost in 1932 when it was declared to be "uneconomic."

Cost To The Citizens

A second cause for the unwarranted persistence of a notorious evil is the finance of Corporation housing. Since 1932 money has been borrowed at an average interest of $4\frac{1}{2}\%$. The arrangements for its repayment are such that loans must be completely liquidated in 35 years. The officially calculated life of a flat is 200 years and of a house 100 years. It is easy to see the effect on rents of this kind of finance. The Housing Tribunal has recommended that interest rates be reduced to 3% and the repayment period extended to 60 years. These two modest reforms alone would save the citizens £167,646 a year, and make possible very much more satisfactory conditions for rehousing the poor.

A third circumstance which is helping to perpetuate slumdom is the failure of the authorities to introduce a system of differential rents, whereby those tenants who are poorest will pay least and those best-off will cease to get the subsidies which are at present being practically forced on them, to the great cost of the ratepayer. Dr. Dillon cites actual cases

both of poor families being driven back into tenements through inability to pay, and of well-to-do families being given totally unwanted subsidies.

Cork's Example

The system of differential rents has been a complete success in Cork, where it was introduced in the face of exactly the same objections that have so far prevented its trial in Dublin. The tendency in Dublin seems, in fact, to have been to assist first those least in need of assistance. One result of this tendency is that the larger grant allotted for slum clearance projects has been obtained only for 25 per cent of the dwellings erected since 1932. Incidentally, this restraint has cost the ratepayers the further large sum of £40,000 a year.

The article from which this truly alarming information has been drawn suggests two constructive measures as a preliminary to any further detailed treatment of the problem. One is the compulsory purchase by the municipality of all slum tenements at a fair valuation. This alone would have saved us all untold sums if it had been done years ago, apart from the misery it could have helped to prevent. The other is the setting up of a statutory Housing Board to deal with the problem as a whole and solve it within some reasonable time.

The task is far beyond the scope of a City Manager's duties, and should not be left any longer to the efforts of the Corporation, valiant though they may have been. In this matter, money and goodwill are clearly not enough. Have we sufficient intelligence to end our greatest shame?

Sunday Independent, 25 March, 1945

The “Export” Of Doctors “Import” Of Scientists

1945-04-01

Is it true, as was recently suggested by a distinguished lecturer, that our industrial progress is being retarded by the lack of sufficient education in scientific subjects in our schools? The lecturer was speaking on plastics, and on the great need that exists for an Irish chemical industry. His point was our poverty in minerals and other raw materials should induce us to develop such an industry.

Under present-day conditions highly-trained chemists can work wonders in the production of such synthetic products as plastics, and with proper organisation, can be made, or make themselves, independent of almost any particular raw material. Everybody has heard something of what chemists in other countries have been doing in this way for more than two generations. Our own chemists and other technical experts have shown very great skill and resource during the present war, and it is to be hoped a full account of their achievement will some day be made public.

Why Disbanded?

Not the least valuable aspect of this achievement has been the demonstration that Irish technicians are quite as capable as any in the world if given an opportunity. Yet before the emergency is anything like over, the Research Bureau, maintained by the State, which did at least partially give them such an opportunity, has been disbanded! No satisfactory reason has been given for this strange step which is very likely to lose us the services of some of our most brilliant experts. In the lecture referred to, a contrast was drawn between our “export” of doctors and the necessity we are under of “importing” industrial scientists.

A Deeper Problem

There is a much deeper problem involved than one of mere perverse choice. The doctors whom we “export” go in fact, entirely of their own free will. They are not put in crates like butter or sold on the hoof like cattle. Furthermore, the fact that we do “export” them has meant that large numbers of candidates for training enter our medical schools every year and that these schools are thus enabled to provide them with as good a training as can be got anywhere.

If we were to be forced by any cause to produce only as many doctors as we ourselves need the cost of production of each doctor would mount enormously.

In the same way, if we wish to make provision for the higher education of all kinds of technicians, industrial scientists, and so forth, we must first be quite clear in our minds that it is going to be a costly process, and then pay the cost cheerfully once we have decided that it is worth paying.

Costly, But Worth It

There can be no doubt that it would be pretty high, nor that it would be well worth our while to pay it. One raw material at least is as plentiful here as anywhere else, and that is brains. On the other hand, quite a small number of such scientists and technicians would meet all our requirements. We could only produce them in large numbers either by “exporting” them in the same way as we “export” doctors, or by exporting the products of their knowledge and skill. As a matter of fact, we already are doing the first to quite a considerable extent.

Since 1939 at least, young Irishmen with good degrees in Physics or Chemistry or Engineering have had no difficulty in getting very good posts abroad.

Whether this will continue to be the case for long when the war is over will depend, of course, on a whole variety of economic and other circumstances over which we are not likely to have much control. The other means which are open to us—export of highly-finished products of various industrial techniques have scarcely yet been considered in any thorough way by any authority here. No doubt, the enterprise will be difficult; it will mean competition, in very crowded markets, with the products of richer and more scientifically advanced countries which have a far longer tradition than we have. Nevertheless, it is the real solution of the problem to which the lecturer referred.

The selection of the right lines on which to develop and the best markets to go in for is as much a matter for exports as are the actual processes of manufacture.

Here is a further consideration which makes the extinction of the Research Bureau inexplicable.

The Original Question

To return to the question with which we began: is there any substance or relevance in the complaint that we have hampered ourselves by “virtually banishing” science from our primary and secondary schools? In view of what has been suggested in the course of the above remarks, it does not really appear that there is. The training of the comparatively small number of technicians we need (or are likely to need) is not a matter for secondary schools, much less for primary, it must be remembered always that these schools exist to give a general education to the 99 per cent or so of our people who are not very likely to become scientists of any kind, not to say industrial technicians.

Scientists in other countries, as well as here, seem to suffer rather unduly from the very human tendency to think that everyone else is like themselves. We must resist the temptation to load our schools with all kinds of burdens, to look to them to produce for us all kinds of handy specialists for filling every need that occurs to us at every moment.

What The Teachers Say

It is arguable, and is indeed argued with much force by experienced teachers, that we have burdened the schools with far too varied a load of special requirements already. Most parents would probably agree, for instance, that a lot of time is now being wasted on grinding at elementary mathematics. Science in primary or secondary schools can only be of real value if it does something to impart an idea of scientific method and a sympathetic outlook on the work of technicians. These, however, should be imparted by way of general education, not as premature essays in specialised training. We live in a scientific age, but we are not all called upon to be chemists or physicists. In fact if most of us, while at school, can learn to read and write, acquire a modicum of civilised taste in the amenities of life, and get some inkling of the difference between right and wrong, we shall probably have as much science as we shall need or can carry.

Sunday Independent, 1 April, 1945

Small Nations And The World's Future

1945-05-06

By the time these lines appear in print the war in Europe may be over—at least for a time. Whether that time will include the remaining years of your life and mine depends, we are told, on the success of the San Francisco Conference (to which we and the Swiss and the Swedes have not been invited), and that, in its turn, depends on the ability of Great Britain, the United States and Russia to agree. But at the moment nobody is too optimistic about that. One article in an Irish contemporary isn't quite so pessimistic. It suggests that the Great Powers are too exhausted to continue the struggle among themselves, and seems to promise us a thirty years' peace of exhaustion and recuperation—for the next war!

I am not very concerned about the prophecy, though it seems to be based on a false analogy with the last war and the last peace. Let us beware of thinking that because we got twenty years of peace before we shall get them again. Certain unpleasant things, unpleasantly termed ideologies, have altered the nature of both war and peace.

But the feature of this excellent article which shocked me was the extraordinary way in which the writer adopted the views of British and American statesmen and publicists almost without question. "Peace depends on America, Britain and Russia"; "If they don't work together, all is lost"; "Documents are no use if the big Powers quarrel." And the writer accepts the view that the big Powers are above the law. So what? Neither you nor I can influence the decisions of any of the big Powers to the extent of a comma, so we must only hope for thirty years' peace before the next explosion.

"Would Be Tragic"

That would be tragic if it were true, but it is not true. The assumption is about as false as any assumption can possibly be. It is part of the hypnosis exercised on the small country by the big country, by the big fellow on the weak one, by the weasel on the rabbit.

When the statesmen and public figures of the Great Powers tell us that they alone are capable of keeping the peace and that if they fail we must all perish, they are hypnotising themselves and us.

The Yalta proposals and the San Francisco Conference are not the creation of people who can keep the peace. Let us face the simple fact that Great Powers like America, Great Britain and Russia, with their far-flung empires, their vast trading interests, their great armies and navies, are by their very nature incapable of keeping the peace. To rely on them is folly.

That is not how civilisation develops. When the towns were unsafe because of footpads it was not the great lords, the Capulets and Montagues, with their gangs of bellicose retainers, who made them into the peaceful places they are. Let us admit that the Crown counted for something; but in practice it was the inoffensive tradesmen who came together, made ordinances, and subscribed the wages of the night watchmen.

Let us admit again that the great lords could afford to scoff at the watch, and that many a poor watchman got beaten and murdered by their hired bullies. But the peaceful tradesmen instead of saying: "Oh, it is only Lord Capulet and Lord Montague who can keep the peace, and if we don't agree we must all perish"; or, "Of course, we all recognise that in practice Lord Capulet and Lord Montague are both above the law." continued to make ordinances and subscribe for the watch. In the end the Capulets and Montagues are only a memory. The policeman remains.

The Small Nations

We must keep on saying, day in, day out, that if peace is ever to be kept in this world it will not be kept by the Capulets and Montagues, by the great Powers with their armies and navies, but by Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway and ourselves: the decent little democracies which offer freedom to their citizens and friendship to their neighbours.

Apart we are pitifully poor and helpless, but if we can get rid of our antiquated ideas of sovereignty and realise that, like other small businessmen, we must insure against the risks which, individually, none of us can meet, we can establish an international police force strong enough to make itself respected.

We can establish a rule of law, and the law and the force behind the law would command the respect and devotion of millions outside our frontiers. Nor would States like ours find themselves alone. Among the so-called Great Powers are some less great than others who might be very glad to exchange the uneasy eminence of a worthless title for the honourable security afforded by a federation of free States. According to our contemporary, *The Bell*, we have thirty years, perhaps, of peace before us. Let us be realistic and put it at seven. But seven or thirty, we must cease to be hypnotised by the siren voices from San Francisco telling us that we are small and powerless and that peace depends on linking up with our biggest neighbour. We must realise that the whole San Francisco Conference, if it talked from this to doomsday, could, in its present "atmosphere," do less for the future of humanity than Dáil Eireann can do.

Sunday Independent, 6 May, 1945

Our Relations With Great Britain

1945-05-13

At any time now we may expect to find the formalities of travel being relaxed. For six years the majority of us have been cooped up in this island of ours with very little in the way of new contacts, new ideas, new plays and books; and for us the opening of the ports will mean the real end of hostilities, the real resumption of normal life. But we should be very foolish to suppose that the England we shall return to will be the England we knew.

It will be a comparatively poor country which will have to work as it has never worked before; it will have to rebuild its towns, restore its trade, re-educate itself for a new world.

It has already set about the task energetically. We shall find wonderful new schools; teachers being turned out by the thousand from improvised training colleges; adult education on a prodigious scale.

Our Position

We may as well face the fact that for us, by comparison, the world has stopped. For many years past we have been withdrawing more and more into ourselves, nourishing ourselves on our own tails. For many years relations between ourselves and our great neighbour have been steadily growing worse, and we should be fools not to realise that they are not good to-day.

A certain amount of that was inevitable. We are a remote agricultural community with too much time to think and too little to think about; and we tend to carry on a feud like people in a remote parish, brooding for long spells over grievances often entirely imaginary; taking the chance of an odd whack at somebody's head; dragging the thing out from generation to generation.

Hatred of England has been kept alive by a system of education entirely directed to political ends, and by politicians who have found that hatred pays the best dividends. Now a generation has grown up who have never even seen a British uniform, but of whom many are infinitely more rancorous than ever their fathers were. Hatred pays the best dividends? Up to a point, yes; but that hatred has now become something meaningless, distorted, and dangerous only to ourselves. It has ceased to be patriotism and become Anglophobia: and as ultimately almost everything reaches us only through England, it has become a hatred of the outside world.

The English, on the other hand, are an industrial community with very short memories, living very busy lives. They are normally kindhearted and good-natured; their faults are indifference and complacency. But they are completely incapable of understanding the mountainy vendetta, and when they are roused, they are very nasty customers indeed. Nobody would be more astonished and injured than our politicians if ever the British chose to reply to their nagging. They would call the world to witness that they had never desired anything but friendly relations; if they had used a stick occasionally it was never with any other intention than to draw attention to their rights; their whole desire throughout had merely been to make everybody happy. And the worst of it is, they would be quite sincere about it, because they are too stupid to realise how their conduct may appear to others.

But it would be a profound mistake to examine our consciences merely because we had strained the patience of our neighbours to the breaking point.

What we need to realise is that whatever our differences with Britain may be, the British people will always be our next-door neighbours and it is in both our interests that our relations should be good ones.

That is an elementary Christian principle.

What can we do about it?

Wealthy Visitors

It is little use to rely on politicians who for years have been cashing in on the dividends of hate. Even if hate ceases to produce dividends, they will still continue to look on it as the magic bank which must, sooner or later pay out again. Whenever things go bad they will blame it on Partition. It is no use saying with General Mulcahy that we must cultivate friendly relations with Great Britain. We must, but we won't, at least in the political sphere. Mr. de Valera and his Ministers will not get off their high horse to be hail-fellow-well-met with British Ministers, even if we all suffer for their folly. (Ministers O'Kelly, Lemass and Ryan did get friendly at the famous Ottawa Conference, but were apparently checked in that course subsequently.)

When the Taoiseach suggested a couple of weeks ago that British visitors left this country with an unfavourable impression merely because they had been entertained by wealthy people who disliked him and his party, and that they could be impressed the other way if they were entertained by a President whose business it would be to preach party politics to them over the wine, he showed that he had simply no conception of the problem, unless it was on the principle of "Thrate him well and he'll buy the cow." It is this crudity and tactlessness which has bedevilled Anglo-Irish relations and will continue to bedevil them in the years to come.

A travelling exhibition in Great Britain of the paintings of Jack Yeats, a tour by the Abbey Theatre players, and by the Edwards-Mac Liammoir Company, might prove a better investment than a President talking party politics over the wine in Phoenix Park.

Sunday Independent, 13 May, 1945

Mr. de Valera And Mr. Churchill

1945-05-20

The past week has seen what may perhaps be described as another round in the contest between Mr. de Valera and Mr. Churchill. Without disrespect to either party, it may be said that while Mr. Churchill had it in the weight, Mr. de Valera scored by neatness of footwork. Mr. Churchill tends to hit wide. His picture of Mr. de Valera “frolicking” with the German Minister infuriated the Taoiseach’s followers and it only raised a wry smile among his opponents. The idea of Mr. de Valera “frolicking” with anybody is, to put it mildly, exaggerated.

Mr. Churchill talked of the British people being compelled either to “perish from the earth” or “come to grips with Mr. de Valera,” which was another overstatement since the policy of neutrality had nothing in particular to do with Mr. de Valera and might as fittingly be attributed to Mr. Cosgrave.

It needs little in the way of apology or defence. It has been the policy of small nations always, and sometimes of big nations, too, Mr. Churchill’s own nation not excepted.

Like other small nations which belonged to the League of Nations, we showed our readiness to help in curbing the aggression of Italy and Germany, even if it led us into war, but Great Britain chose to tear up the charter of the League, and combined with the dictators of Germany and Italy to dismember and destroy the peaceful and progressive nation of Czechoslovakia.

Great Britain called the tune, and can hardly complain if it was left to pay the piper.

Shifted The Issue

Mr. Churchill was generous in his reference to the part played by Irishmen in the war, and in his plea for mutual comprehension. But it must be admitted that in the larger sense his speech was unfortunate and left a great many sore feelings. Mr. de Valera redressed the balance and comforted injured susceptibilities. He kept his head, and his neatly placed analogy of the six counties commanding the Straits of Dover with the six counties of Northern Ireland would alone have made him winner of the round on points. It was a superb bit of footwork. I am not sure that it was much more.

To begin with it shifted the issue of neutrality from the firm and indisputable ground of international procedure to the very shaky one of national politics.

Put it like this. If at the time Britain restored the ports to us she had also restored the six counties of Northern Ireland, should we then, on the outbreak of war, have declared war on Germany?

I think the majority of my readers will say at once that we should have done nothing of the kind, since every instinct of national self-preservation would have been against it.

Then why, in heaven’s name, does Mr. de Valera put up the existence of Partition as a reason for our neutrality? Is it not that he is being a little bit too clever and endeavouring to turn a real disagreement of interests between Great Britain and ourselves, which should be stated in its baldest and most emphatic form, into a party issue?

Taoiseach’s Past

I, for one, am old enough to remember the time when Mr. de Valera was not quite so certain that the Six Counties were being withheld from the rest of Ireland by force, and was prepared to concede their right to secession as a matter of conscience. Has he changed his mind, and does he now propose to coerce Ulster into union?

But when I have said that Mr. de Valera’s address was rather less than candid, I agree that he had the best of the verbal tussle. And then? Well, then, Round Fifty Three is over

and the rest of the programme will follow in due course. In fact after all the dust has died down, we are not one inch nearer agreement with Great Britain than we were before, and we are prepared to go on exchanging wireless courtesies till the end of time.

If we were a pair of farmers at a fair we should make a greater effort at a common understanding. We should argue it out in a friendly way over a drink in a pub, or call in a few friends and neighbours to decide between us. Instead (to vary the metaphor) we are both going back home at the end of the day with our business unfinished, our cattle unsold, and nothing to console us but the bad names we have called one another. It seems to me cold comfort. Mr. Churchill talked about “comprehension” and Mr. de Valera talked about “a vision of a nobler and better ending” which had been revealed to him, but neither of them said a word about what he proposed to do about it.

Vision Of Hatred

Does either of them propose to do anything? What is this “vision of a nobler and better ending” that Mr. de Valera speaks about? Is it the vision of his followers who describe as “Quislings,” “fawning at the knees of the victors,” every man and woman in Ireland who honestly rejoices in the victory of the armies in which hundreds of thousands of Irishmen fought; who describe as “a little Ascendancy group” that great proportion of the people of Ireland whose humanity has been shocked to the very heart by the devilries of Belsen and Buchenwald (devilries which they no more ascribe to the people of Germany than they ascribe the atrocities of the Black and Tans to the people of England)? Or were the Englishmen who were shocked by the atrocities of the Black and Tans “Quislings”?

No, Mr. de Valera may speak loftily of his “vision of a nobler and better ending,” but in this crazy attempt to split the Irish people into those who blindly follow his lead and those “Quislings” who do not, there is no vision but a vision of hatred; hatred of England, hatred of every Irishman who sees any merit whatever in England, and that hatred, if Mr. de Valera’s lieutenants have their way, will go on for our lifetime, and embitter yet another generation of boys and girls as it has embittered his generation and mine.

Sunday Independent, 20 May, 1945

Bevin, Big Man In Britain To-Day

1945-05-27

The British General Election has roots in a dark past when we in Ireland still slumbered securely in the womb of Censorship, and no more than the new-born child do many of us realise exactly what it is all about. We may know or have guessed that the Coalition Cabinet which has just dissolved was one of the most efficient Britain ever had; it may have dawned on us that for a country which produced so little of its own food, Britain, compared with Ireland, which produces so much, was in some ways faring rather better. But few people at this side of the Channel realise that apart from Mr. Churchill, the biggest figure in British politics to-day is Mr. Ernest Bevin, outgoing Minister of Labour. Mr. Bevin produced a revolution in industrial organisation which was among the things that made victory possible. With the confidence of Mr Churchill, he succeeded in making employers accept drastic controls on their activities. They handed over a share of management to the workers; threw their factories open to Government inspectors; built where they were told, produced what they were told and in the quantities required. Mr. Bevin succeeded in making Labour accept controls even more drastic. The Trade Unions meekly allowed untrained girls to supplant skilled men; workers to be sent where they were required; appointed themselves supervisors of labour, and reported men consistently absent or late for punishment in the police courts.

The results on British industrial capacity were incredible. In every direction production expanded beyond the most optimistic forecasts, and towards the end of the war was actually an embarrassment.

People's Will

Now you may, if you please, call this socialism, though I doubt very much if that word has any meaning in a world where every dictator is a socialist and claims absolute control not only over every man's property but over his life. It may best be described as a typical British reply to socialist dictatorship. It was as drastic in some ways as any dictatorship, but it never for an instant *was* dictatorship.

It rested always on the consent of the majority of the electorate, and the electorate knew it.

Now that phase is over. For years before the end of the war America had been preparing industry for a fresh drive in the direction of industrial expansion. If there is to be a fight for markets, the British employer wants a free hand to get his share, and for a long time there have been cries within the Conservative Party for an end to controls. They will not fight the election on that issue. but on an emotional appeal to the ordinary Englishman's love of Mr. Churchill. At the same time the issue will really be the issue of controls.

For myself. I find it difficult to imagine how any British Government, Conservative or Labour, could dispense entirely with controls. That would mean that British manufacturers could again build where they please and produce what they please. But Britain is no longer the rich country she was six years ago. If she is to get the materials she needs for reconstruction she must export on a vast scale, and that means she cannot satisfy the needs of the home market (and possibly of our own). To do so would produce inflation, a short boom and then a desperate slump. Whatever happens, rationing of commodities in some form must continue for a long time yet.

Bevin's Policy

Nor am I sure that Britain can return to competition with America in the field of manufactured goods. Britain built up her position as "the workshop of the world" by keeping up

the price of manufactured goods and manipulating the price of food against the agricultural producer. Wealth in the pre-war world meant manufactures. We too suffered from that policy, but to nothing like the same degree as other countries.

Wheat was being burned and fruit dumped in the sea because the agricultural producer could get no reasonable price for his products.

But at the same time peasants who could not get a reasonable price for their products were unable to buy the manufactures of Britain, and factories were closed down and millions of men stood idle.

Mr. Bevin recognises that Britain can return to that system only at her peril.

In a most remarkable speech which he made a few days ago he put the situation in a nutshell. "We are the greatest importers of food in the world," he said. "We can 'police' prices. We stand for a universally orderly but sufficient distribution of food: for taking away from any middle-man the right to exploit it by manipulation and gambling on the market.

"If the industrial worker in countries like Britain is to maintain a decent standard of living, then you must be just to the peasant, because he cannot buy your goods unless the price is a right price. Taking the world as a whole, no one is so poor as the agricultural and primary producer."

British Colonies

A speech like that may lack the emotional appeal of "The Man Who Won the War," but it appeals profoundly to common sense.

America, still comparatively safe from the possibility of invasion, can still think in terms of unrestricted commercial activity; but we in Europe see that great tract of territory engulfed by Russia, in which the law of supply and demand is now suspended; in which the production of food can be developed regardless of the manipulation of middlemen; without any attempt to force down the price and drive the population to emigration.

If Britain makes the mistake of imagining that she can resume her old role as "the workshop of the world" at the expense of the remaining agricultural countries, it will simply mean that still more of Europe will be swallowed up by totalitarianism.

The real part that Britain can play in the new organisation of the world is to develop her colonies, to force up the standard of living among agricultural workers, and thus provide herself with the markets her industries need.

It would be foolish for anyone at this side of the Channel to prophesy which policy will appeal to the British electorate in its present mood. Will it follow the appeal to common sense rather than the appeal to the emotions? The answer will be eagerly awaited by the whole world.

Sunday Independent, 27 May, 1945

Ireland and the Commonwealth: Friendly Co-Operation Or Isolation?

1945-07-22

Two significant events have just taken place in the British Commonwealth which are worthy of attention in Ireland. The Commonwealth Air Transport Council has been meeting and has issued an official statement dealing with parallel partnership schemes for various routes throughout the Commonwealth. But, in addition, Air Marshal Johnson Chief of the Canadian Air Service, has made a statement saying that the parallel partnership scheme will not be applied to the North Atlantic.

Canada holds that that scheme would not be the best method for the North Atlantic route; instead, there will be "free and friendly competition." Canada believes that the volume of traffic will warrant separate services. In other words, she is going to build up her own passenger and merchant air services, and is quite ready to challenge, *in friendly competition*, the might of Great Britain.

It will be remembered that in the Dáil during the week Mr. de Valera, in answer to questions by General Mulcahy, stated that this country had not been invited to the Air Transport Council meetings, but he added that he quite understood why we had not been invited, namely, that the other countries of the Commonwealth were at war and we were not.

Let us turn now to Australia. The manner of the appointment of the new Prime Minister in that country has been questioned in England. "Some interesting constitutional issues have been raised," says Lord Hardinge, because the party in power has made the choice of the new Premier, the representative of the Crown merely swearing him in. In other words, Mr. Chifley when taking office, has not worried overmuch about the niceties of previous procedure. But the British Government are not likely to challenge in any way what Mr. Chifley's Government has done. Australia will act in accordance with her independent status in matters concerning herself, and at the same time will have friendly co-operation with Great Britain on subjects of interest to both countries.

But Mr. de Valera will not have that "friendly co-operation" with Great Britain which Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa cultivate.

It is useless for him to say he wants to have friendly relations with our neighbor when he does nothing to bring them about.

Actions mean more than words. He sits silently back. In simple language "he won't play." He declares, "We are in the Commonwealth but not of it." And later he does not know, he tells Mr. Dillon, if we are in the Commonwealth. For the moment he will not use dictionaries, English or American, to get an answer to this question. Surely the Taoiseach is too honest to suggest that he is doing his best to promote friendly relations with Great Britain.

The alternative to his present methods is to co-operate honestly and openly with the nations of the Commonwealth.

Is it not better to work in friendliness with independent-minded Canada and Australia, South Africa and New Zealand, than to sit back in isolation in Dublin?

Mr. de Valera has many points on his side, of course, when he insists he cannot do this while Ireland is partitioned. But he is not alone in passionately desiring that the mutilation of our country should be ended. And he is not without responsibility for that mutilation. He talks about dreaming dreams. Which recalls Kipling: "If you can dream—and not make dreams your master." What is the use of dreaming about castles in the air, about a united Ireland, and at the same time remaining sullenly outside a circle of nations that could help you to make your dreams come true?

Is Mr. Chifley, the Labour Premier of Australia, who is of Irish parentage, likely to

do more to help to bring about the unity of Ireland if Irish Ministers never meet him at Commonwealth conferences than if they sat around a table with him and discussed their many problems?

Let Mr. de Valera give the dictionaries a rest for a while and become a realist.

Sunday Independent, 22 July, 1945

We Are In It, States The Taoiseach's Paper

1945-07-29

The *Irish Press*, the mouthpiece of Mr. de Valera, boldly marched the Taoiseach and the country into the British Commonwealth on last Tuesday morning. Heading its leading article. "A Dangerous Game." it said:—

"When Mr. de Valera spoke on our relations with the countries of the British Commonwealth in the Dáil the other day, he said:

"As a mother country, we have our people in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere. There are no other nations so closely associated with us and no other people on earth with whom we would be better pleased to be associated in any political group.'

"That is the statement of a truth felt by all Irishmen. It reflects the minds not of particular groups and sections in our country, but of the whole people.

"In the latest issue of the *Sunday Independent* there is an anonymous article on Mr. de Valera's statements on our relations with the British Commonwealth. It does not contain the important passage from Mr. de Valera's statement, but instead it suggests that the Government of this State does not desire friendly relations with the very countries than were so warmly described by the Taoiseach as 'no other people on earth with whom we would be better pleased to be associated.'

"Is it not better,' the writer of the article asked, 'to work in friendliness with independent-minded Canada and Australia, South Africa and New Zealand than to sit back in isolation in Dublin?'

"And further

"What is the use of dreaming about castles in the air, about a united Ireland, and at the same time remaining sullenly outside a circle of nations that could help to make your dreams come true?'

"The suggestion in these two paragraphs is that we do not want to co-operate with the nations of the British Commonwealth and that we sullenly withdraw from association into isolation when association is open to us"

To Be Shunned

Of course, everybody knows that in the past the Taoiseach has spoken of "external association" and of "being in the Commonwealth but not of it." But last week his own paper was able to charge that *The Sunday Independent* was playing "a dangerous game" because it suggested that Mr. de Valera was refusing to co-operate with the nations of the British Commonwealth, and, instead, was sitting back in isolation in Dublin.

The truth is the *Irish Press* now proclaims that the Taoiseach is longing to co-operate with the Commonwealth. Isolation is something to be shunned. The Taoiseach will be delighted to attend Commonwealth Conferences and there meet the Ministers of independent-minded Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. The *Sunday Independent* is to be congratulated for getting this declaration from the Taoiseach's own newspaper. In future our Ministers will meet British Ministers and co-operate with them in seeking solutions for problems affecting both countries. Isolation is at an end. It will not be necessary for Mr. Atlee, or Field-Marshal Smuts, or Mr. Chifley, to come to Dublin if they wish to discuss Irish affairs. The Taoiseach and our Ministers will move abroad to Commonwealth Conferences and meet them there.

We Are Sorry

Last Sunday we wrote: —

“It is useless for him (Mr. de Valera) to say he wants to have friendly relations with our neighbour when he does nothing to bring them about.”

The Irish Press charges that we were playing “a dangerous game.” I am sorry, and I am sure the *Sunday Independent* is sorry, too, that, we misinterpreted the Taoiseach’s methods.

These are fateful days for the whole world. The country will be glad to know that Mr. de Valera, as announced by his own mouthpiece, is now definitely in the British Commonwealth and longing to co-operate with its other members. Perhaps it was “a dangerous game” to ask if we were to have friendly co-operation or isolation so far as the Commonwealth is concerned. But the air has been cleared. The *Irish Press* says we are in the Commonwealth and that co-operation is the order of the day.

Sunday Independent, 29 July, 1945

Ruin And Loss In Ireland

1945-09-23

Fifty years ago the National Trust was established in Great Britain. Five years later Kanturk Castle, its first and last piece of property in Eire, was presented to it. Those fifty years have been, as the title of the Batsford book* proudly proclaims, an "achievement." The Trust now owns five hundred of the most famous beauty spots in Great Britain: castles, manor houses, inns or groups of old-world cottages; and so far as anything in this world can be safeguarded, they are being safeguarded for generations yet unborn.

Among its possessions are two entire villages, including the delightful village of West Wycombe, with its great house. It is prepared to take over and maintain anything and everything of beauty or historic interest which by good management can be made to pay its way. This is what it did with a group of three old cottages overlooking an old bridge in Eashing, Surrey:—

It was decided to convert the two small timber-framed cottages into one, with livingroom, sittingroom, bedroom, kitchen, etc., on the ground floor; with two bedrooms and combined bathroom-W.C. upstairs. ... (The architect) has contrived the same accommodation in the brick-built cottage, though in this case the third bedroom is on the upper floor. Thus the fortunate tenants have the advantage of modern living standards of comfort within an externally beautiful building.

From a vast estate down to the humblest cottage, the Trust is prepared to take over and keep safe.

Do We Care?

And what can we in Ireland boast of in the same period? Is it that we have not got cottages, mills, inns and country houses as beautiful as those illustrated in this record? Or is it, that having them, we neither know nor care whether they exist? I am very much afraid it is the latter.

I can go to my shelf and take down a score of books (most of them published by the publishers of this book, who have done work almost as important as that of the National Trust itself in reminding the people of England of their heritage), which picture the villages and towns of England, with their churches, their manor houses, their ruined abbeys.

Not one book shall I be able to find which will do as much for Ireland.

I am writing this in the capital of Ireland, one of the most beautiful art cities in Europe, but apart from passing references in books like Sacheverell Sitwell's recent "British Architects and Craftsmen," there is literally no book dealing with the art treasures of Dublin in existence if one excepts the publications of the Georgian Society, now priced at £40 the set

As a result, the past fifty years which have represented "achievement" for England have represented nothing but ruin and loss for us.

In the six years of war the wanton attitude of the Irish Government has left Ireland as littered with ruins as if we had been involved in a major campaign. "Big houses" everywhere have been handed over to the housebreakers for what they would fetch, and, among others, Lady Gregory's house in Coole which, maintained, would have been worth a considerable annual income to the district, was sold for £500—the price of a three-roomed cottage. Would it not have been worth that sum to the Irish Tourist Board to maintain the house as a museum?

Little To Be Proud Of

The protection afforded by the National Monuments Commission has been little but illusory. Apart from certain buildings in private hands like Cahir Castle and the abbeys on the Dunraven estate, which are models of intelligent preservation, we have little to be proud of. One of the remaining fortified houses in Kilmallock has been torn down to make way for a cinema, and the National Monuments Commission never turned a hair. Even if a cinema was of more importance than a fortified house, even if no other site was available, could the Commission at least not have preserved the front?

The "Sunday Independent" has drawn attention to the fact that great, abbey churches are used as latrines and hand-ball alleys. and there is at least one example of a church where the sanctuary itself has been built off as a ball alley.

In any civilised community this would be regarded as what, in fact, it is—sacrilege.

It has also protested against the neglect of the Butler house at Carrick-on-Suir, the last remaining example of the Irish manor house, and at last we learn that the National Monuments Commission are considering acquiring it—too late to save the priceless stucco-work

Outrages Go On

Even while this article has been going through the Press two further outrages have occurred which have drawn impassioned protests from Mr. C.P. Curran and Dr. George Little, President of the Old Dublin Society. The La Touche Bank has been demolished, and its splendid Venus ceiling has gone to join the Tracton House Apollo in some shed belonging to the Board of Works.

"Delville," the home of Swift's friend, Dr. Delaney, a house which is famous wherever the English language is spoken, is likewise to be torn down.

"Are we ourselves," asks Mr. Curran, "to destroy the title deeds of our civilisation? Is Ireland to be sold for junk?" I am afraid that a great deal of Ireland has already been sold for junk, and that generations to come will point to Mr. de Valera's Government, as the men who sold it.

What Davis Said

What is the cause of this deplorable state of affairs? It is simply and solely the lack of artistic education, the complete absence of books which would show our young people how much they still have to be proud of.

We are still at the state of writing about "architecture" as if it consisted entirely of Gandon's Custom House and Cooley's Four Courts, ignoring the fact that every town and village where civilised people have lived is architecture just as much as the things which get into the guide-books, and that we can scarcely walk a mile in any direction without meeting a canal bridge, a lock-keeper's collage, a row of houses or a ruined parish church which are in their own way as beautiful as anything travel could reveal to us, and which are of more importance to us simply because they are part of our immediate background.

The members of the National Monuments Commission are probably largely antiquarians who are incapable of realising that whole towns and villages, like Kinsale, Westport, Roscrea, Portarlinton—probably the finest of Irish towns and Castleconnell, the approach to which has now been ruined by the housebreakers—are monuments of civilised life every bit as important to us as the greatest Cistercian abbey. Few of our towns are without architectural interest. Not one of them, so far as I am aware, makes any effort to preserve it. During the centenary of Thomas Davis, who advised us to "educate that you may be free."

It might be no harm to reflect that in the preservation of our national heritage we are every bit as uneducated as the people of a hundred years ago—and we have a great deal less left us to lose.

Matter of Urgency

What can be done on the practical side is hard to say. It is not to be expected that many of the remaining great houses, containing treasures of artistic work, will survive the economic difficulties of the post-war period, and it has become a matter of urgency to decide whether they can be preserved for the nation or whether, like Lady Gregory's house, they will be handed over to the house-breakers.

[Picture: Carrick Castle, near Carrick-on-Suir, the only remaining example of the Irish manor house. Its priceless stucco work is now almost wholly destroyed.]

* **The National Trust**. A Record of Fifty Years Achievement. (Batsford, 1945)

Sunday Independent, 23 Sept. 1945