MEMORIES OF A MAYOMAN

FNT Edward O'Malley

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EDWARD O'MALLEY

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I

Early Boyhood

MY EARLIEST MEMORY is of looking out and seeing the road near our house crowded with cattle as far as my limited vision would allow. They were the property of the Marquis of Sligo and had been driven off his land the previous night. One of the bullocks had a placard fastened to its horns with the words, "The land for the people, and the road for the bullocks!" Michael Davitt had died some years previously, Parnell was already dead, but the Sligo Estate had not yet been sold to the Congested Districts Board (later to become the Irish Land Commission) for distribution among the tenants. The cattle were not always turned out on the road. On some occasions the people went boldly to the landlord's house and demanded trespass, in which case there might be a baton charge by the police if any trouble arose.

About this time a meeting was held in Brackloon School, under the chairmanship of Fr. Canavan, Adm. of Westport, to ask the tenants if they were prepared to sign over their rights to the game and fishing of their holdings to the Marquis of Sligo, to expediate the sale of the estate. All the tenants, except two, refused to sign them over. The matter seems to have rested there. The estate was sold subsequently, and vested in the tenants.

The farm-houses in those days were mostly thatched, with bog-deal rafters and ribs. The kitchens were usually eighteen feet long by fourteen wide, with earthen floors and open fireplaces, having a stone seat called a "hob" on either side. The land was cultivated by digging with a spade or loy, which was a turf *sleán* from which the "wing" had been removed by a blacksmith, and the iron rein-

forced. When the corn was ripe in the autumn, it was cut with curved reaping hooks and later stacked neatly in the haggard.

A fine day in wintertime was chosen to carry it into the kitchen, where it was threshed with a flail; this consisted of two oak or holly sticks bound together by a short piece of sheepskin called a "tug".

This moved around on one of the sticks as the operator struck the sheaves to separate the oats from the straw. The oats was then riddled to remove any remaining straws, put into bags, and carried to a hillock on a windy day: here a sheet was spread on the ground, and the oats shaken on to it from a *bodhrán* like that used by musical groups. The wind carried away the chaff, and the oats was put back into the bags. The winnowing thus carried out could be compared with that of a modern threshing machine, but it took much longer to carry out.

Westport at this time had only two motor-cars. One belonged to a Mr. Livingstone, who owned a brewery, the other to the Marquis of Sligo. As a barefoot boy, I used to run from the fields to see the "gentlemen" in velveteens disappear in a cloud of dust as they went to shoot wild birds. Only the police had bicycles. A policeman who came to take the census in 1911 had a small ink-bottle hooked to the front of his tunic. I wonder if the fountain pen had been invented at that time?

In my native townland there were the ruins of many houses, the occupants of which had vanished without trace, with the exception of one girl with the unusual name of Devine, who remained to nurse three further generations, and died in the 1920s at the age of 105 years. Searching among the ruins, I could find no relics of occupation except a number of small clay pipes which could be smoked with an economy of tobacco. We can only surmise that those poor people moved away about the time of the Famine, and never returned. There are traces of ridges in many places which even Time, the great leveller, has failed to

erase. Perhaps they mark the last effort for survival of those people of bygone days.

There is a cave in Brackloon Wood which must be of pre-historic origin. The entrance, which may now be closed, was about three feet high, but farther on there was a fairly long passage, where one had to crawl on hands and knees to reach a chamber where one could stand upright and walk about. I explored it when I was a boy.

At one end was a formation of stones which resembled a fire-place, but there was no way by which the smoke could escape. The roof was formed by an ingenious placing of flags, each one overlapping the other, until they met in the centre. A thorough search failed to find any other chamber. There is no local tradition connected with the cave, as far as I am aware.

In my childhood the young people amused themselves by holding dances in the kitchens to the music of a melodeon. The boys did not dress up for these functions. Songs were sung, usually about a man who stood apart because of his prowess in some physical feat. One was about an Achill school-teacher, whose only claim to fame seems to have been his ability to escape from, and outwit, the police.The song had a rhythm and metre that appealed to our boyish imagination. One verse told about how—

> Some years ago, here in Mayo, we had a hunt before,
> After years of toil, they captured me by Achill's rugged shore.
> Three hundred warriors on my track, full many a mile they ran
> On barren ground before they found the famous Lynchehaun!!

Another lauded the deeds of "The Gallant Morrissey", a boxer who met the challenge of some un-named Russian in far off Tierra del Fuego. There was nothing modest about our hero. He boasted, "For I can flail a Yankee, or any Russian bear, and in honour of old Paddy's Land, the laurel green I'll wear". The song was a long one and gave a round-after-round description of the fight that would put

a modern television commentator in the shade. Other songs, like the following, were sung that have their origin in Greek mythology —

> Ye Muses nine, to Parnassus incline, attend and aid my poetical notion.
> At Venus's Court, I mean to resort, it's the fittest for youthful devotion.

It may have been translated into English by some hedge schoolmaster.

Despite their admiration for law-breakers, the majority of the people were honest and industrious. They were a self-reliant and, to a great extent, self-supporting people. The wool shorn from their own sheep was carded in their homes, spun on a spinning wheel, and sent to the local weaver to be woven into blankets or cloth called "bruckaun" which the local tailor would fashion into suits. The underwear was usually made by the women in the home, from patterns handed on from one generation to another. The reception of free money, which was called "Outdoor Relief", carried a stigma that has disappeared with the emergence of the Welfare State. Where nearly everything had to be done by hand, their preoccupation with the different crafts which formed the pattern of their lives kept the people happy. There was no worry about income tax, and a game of cards, or a story-telling session around a good turf fire, was, perhaps, a good substitute for a blaring radio or television set.

Weddings in those days were, wherever people could afford it, elaborate affairs. The bridegroom and a number of guests went on side-cars to the bride's home on the wedding morning, where they had refreshments; and from thence to the bridegroom's home, where the wedding feast took place. This performance was called the "Drag", and was sometimes composed of as many as eight side-cars. A feature of the wedding feast was the attendance of a number of uninvited guests, called "Strawboys" because they wore masks made of straw. They were led by a

"captain", and entertained the guests by singing and reciting, for which they were given refreshments. Their arrival was looked forward to by the younger guests, as they lent colour to the occasion; they usually left in less than an hour.

Wakes were held in the kitchen, where the corpse was laid out. Each person who attended was given a clay pipe, which was filled with leaf tobacco, and had the number 45 stamped on the bowl. The young people sometimes whiled away the time by playing a game called "Harth a brogue". The boys sat in a circle on the floor, one remaining in the centre. A short plaited rope with a knot at the end was passed around under their knees. With the rope, they struck at the boy in the middle until he found the boy who had it. This boy had then to take his place. The game was not regarded as any disrespect to the dead, but if the dead person was young it was not played. Both customs have been discontinued for many years.

Seaweed — or wrack, as the people called it — was used to manure the potato crop. Young people looked forward eagerly to a day on the strand at the first spring tide. Bags of perrywinkles and cockles were gathered, as well as razor-fish, and baurnachs, which clung to the rocks if not removed with one smart stroke of the reaping hook used to cut the wrack. The old people used to tell us stories about the fox who, in spite of his cunning, was held fast by a shell-fish until he was drowned by the rising tide.

On the occasion of the National Pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick in July, we often had pilgrims stay with us the night before. One party, two of whom were named Mike Diskin and Peter FitzHenry, had walked from Clonbur. On the summit, people used to walk long distances barefoot over rough stones; some crawled around the circle of the summit on bare knees as part of the religious exercises. The building of a small chapel there, through the efforts of Fr. Michael McDonnell, was a great achievement, as most of the material had to be carried up by hand.

The period was not without its "con-men". One night

in the summer of 1914 a man called to the house of my uncle, who lived with my grandmother next door to us. My uncle was not there at the time, but another boy and myself were with my grandmother, who was an Old Age Pensioner. The stranger asked her if she was getting the pension, and on being told that she was, asked if he could see her pension-book. He looked through it, handed it back, and began to explain that, owing to the war, this pension was being suspended. Instead, a person drawing the pension seven years would get a bulk sum of £49. Otherwise he or she would get a sum equal to the number of years they had been drawing the pension, multiplied by seven. He did not ask for any money, but he was given a meal, as was the custom at the time. He seemed to be a man of intelligence, as he began to discuss "Gray's Elegy in a Country Churchyard" with a neighbour who called on a visit.

By this time, my uncle had come home and, realizing that the stranger was some sort of shady character, asked him to leave, as it was now bedtime. When the door was opened, it was raining quite heavily; the stranger remarked that one would not turn out a dog on a night like that. He was then allowed to stay until morning, when my uncle told him he was going to Westport, and would deliver any message he wished to send. He took out a slip of paper and wrote in a good hand, "To the Railway Hotel, Westport. Please send out a car, and a list of Old Age Pensioners in the Croaghpatrick district. Henry F. Vascoyle". Soon after, he went on his way and, beyond a vague rumour that he had been arrested, we never heard of him or his pension scheme again. My uncle did not deliver the message, nor did he notify the police.

The sinking of the *Titanic*, which took place when she struck an iceberg on her maiden voyage in 1912, caused something more than a ripple in our young lives. I remember a picture in the papers of a man being pushed away from a life-boat with an oar, because there was no room for him.

Many Irish people were lost on the liner. The ballad-makers were busy telling of the tragedy. One song told how —

> Our good ship, the *Titanic*, went down to rise no more,
> And it has left many a broken heart today 'round Erin's shore.

The tragedy of the *Titanic's* loss was only the prelude to a more exciting epoch. The sequence of events pointed to the possibility of a war in Europe in the immediate future.

The following story, told to me by Mr. Paddy Thornton, an Agricultural Instructor, will give an idea of the climate of thought in 1913.

At a meeting in Tourmakeady, a speaker intimated that a day might come when they would strike a blow for Irish freedom. Noting the refined demeanour of the man on the platform, a red-faced "fighting Irishman" shouted from the back of the crowd, "The likes of you wouldn't strike many blows!" There was no reply. The name of the gentle speaker was *Patrick H. Pearse*: there is no record of the interrupter.

However, the general feeling of the Irish people towards Britain was one of friendliness. Old enmities were regarded as past history. I heard people say that "the British Government of today [that is, 1913] is not that of one hundred years ago". One year later, Britain was to declare war on Germany in defence of Belgium, whose territory the German Army had violated. Home Rule for Ireland was postponed until the end of the war, and John Redmond called on his Volunteers to enlist in the British Army, to fight for the rights of small nations, including Ireland.

I was a school-boy at the time, and it may interest the educators of today to know what we were taught. I have before me a booklet given to me entitled, *What is Patriotism?*, by May C. Starkie. I will give only a short extract:

The deeds of the Irish soldier, fighting in every corner of the world from the seventeenth century down to the twentieth, form a noble record of self-sacrifice, heroism

and devotion to duty that cannot be read without a tightening of the heart and a thrill of pride. When we listen to the accounts of the exploits of the Irish Guards at Mons, kneeling in prayer before going into action; of the famous charge of the London Irish at Loos, kicking a football before them, and shouting, "On the ball, London Irish"; of the deeds of the Connaught Rangers, the Dublin Fusiliers, the Munster Fusiliers, the Inniskillings at Gallipoli; of Mike O'Leary's Homeric killing of eight Germans, of the boy Dwyer, we seem to be transported to the old days of Conn of the Hundred Fights, to Cuchulainn and his heroes. The roll of honour would be a long one to write down, but, without mentioning one's own day, we may remember with pride the Irish Generals, Sarsfield, Peter Lacy, who was Field Marshal to Czar Peter of Russia and Governor of Livonia in 1699; Wellington, Wolseley, the Napiers, Roberts, John Nicholson, or William Butler."

We were also given a booklet entitled *Patriotism and Endurance*, by Cardinal Mercier of Belgium, which bore the prophetic words, "I believe that the treatment of Belgium and its people will seal the doom of the Kaiser and his crew".

How was it, then, that half a dozen years afterwards we were to find ourselves members of the Irish Volunteers, and the sworn enemies of British rule in Ireland? The gentle Miss Starkey would, no doubt, be horrified to think that she was turning quiet schoolboys into men of violence, but we believed that we had the same right to fight for our country, if called upon to do so, as the men of any other nation.

In the summertime, I usually spent my holidays with relations in Erriff. Their house had many features different from the other two homes in the immediate area. It was much longer, and had a ball-room with ceiling and boarded floor. It also had a pantry and dairy. Forming one pillar of the open fireplace was a large smooth stone which had the following prayer engraved on its smooth surface —

Oh Lord of Mercy, it's now I crave, from the flames of Hell
my soul to save,
But whilst a sinner, prolong my days, that I may better observe
Thy way.
With a penitent heart, I will adore the Lord of Mercy for
evermore,
And when my sins are all forgiven, that God may raise my
soul to Heaven.

The house had been occupied by a landlord's agent named Grant, after the original owner had been driven out; hence the ball-room and other amenities. It is something of a mystery how the aristocrats of the day got to the place on the occasion of the balls which must have been held there. The Erriff had no bridge on the Westport side, with the exception of a shaky wooden footbridge, over which the "gentry" could hardly be expected to venture at night. A road ran eastward towards Derrycroff, but this was several hundred yards from the ballroom. They may have ridden on horses, of course, in which case they would probably have an escort of soldiers.

Mr. Grant and his friends do not seem to have been anxious for any dialogue with the Catholic Church. The prayer on the pillar, which was signed P. D. 1808, was cemented over, and apparently lost forever. However, as time passed, and the landlords had to move out, a member of the Hoban family, who now occupied the house, and had heard of the prayer from an old man who knew the words, chiseled off the covering, and restored the writing as it had been inscribed by Pat Duffy in 1808. So, this "sermon in stone" has survived, despite all the efforts of the conquerors to eraze it. The house is now occupied by Mr. J. Gavin and his family.

II

Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers

With the start of the war in 1914, every effort was made to induce Irishmen to join the British Army. A recruiting meeting was held in Westport, at which the Connaught Rangers, under a Capt. Balfe, paraded; Fianna boy scouts under John Thomas Walsh held a counter-march; some disorder ensued, which led to prosecutions. It was stated in court that there were cries of "Up the Kaiser!" People shouted, "Shall we fight for the Saxon?" and the answer was, "No!" It was the Connaught Rangers, who later mutinied in India as a protest against the "Black and Tan" terror in Ireland — one of them, Jim Daly, giving up his life.

I was a schoolboy when news reached us that the Sinn Féin Volunteers had risen. The first report was that Dublin Castle had been seized, and the Bridge of Athlone blown up. As no paper but the *Irish Times*, which we never read, had been published during Easter Week, 1916, the first paper to reach us was the *London Daily Sketch*. It had a photograph of Major John MacBride marching away with head erect after being sentenced to death by court martial. He had organized and led the Irish Brigade that fought against the British in the Boer War.

Major MacBride was evidently regarded by the British as a man of importance. At a Royal Commission set up to inquire into the causes of the Rebellion, Mr. J. C. Percy, an honorary recruiting worker, was asked by Mr. Justice Shearman, "Have you ever run up against Major Mac Bride?" The answer was, "Yes. There are two towns in the West of Ireland only forty miles apart — Ballina and Westport. Ballina did splendid in recruiting. Then you go

to Westport and you cannot get recruits. We were told that Major MacBride dominates the place." Asked, "Have you done successfully in recruiting for the Navy?" he replied, "Yes. I don't think there is the same prejudice against the Navy as the Army. We had a fine meeting at Westport, although we did not get any recruits. (*Laughter*) I asked them if they wanted to fight for Ireland, and they said 'Yes'. I told them they could not fight for Ireland without the Navy, and they agreed". (*Laughter*)

Our first reaction was one of amazement at the courage of the Volunteers, whom we believed had no hope of success.

It may be noted by some writers of today, who frequently assert that the Irish bishops were always the enemies of freedom, that the Hierarchy did not condemn the Rising. When Dr. O'Dwyer, Bishop of Limerick, was asked by Sir John Maxwell, the British Commander, to censure two priests who favoured Sinn Féin, he made a statement containing the words: "Ireland will never be content as a province. God made her a nation, and while grass grows and water runs there will be men in Ireland to dare and to die for her". In 1917 Most Rev. Dr. Fogarty of Killaloe declared — "Never were the young men and women of Ireland a greater joy and glory to their country than they are today. Never more sincerely Catholic, high minded, virtuous and heroic. They can and will, without violence, win this fight for freedom in spite of dragoons and defamation. There is a fissure in Dublin Castle, and the cement is not yet made that will close it. In a few years it will be buried with the Bastille of Paris in the Limbo of Time".

Meanwhile there was a new awakening in Ireland. Sinn Féin clubs were being formed, and with them Volunteer companies to back up their demands. Comdt. E. Moane started Croaghpatrick Club at the home of Mr. Thomas O'Malley, Owenwee, and with it "B" Company, 3rd Batt., West Mayo Brigade, Irish Volunteers, which was later to take a vital part in the struggle that developed. At first

their activities consisted of route marches, sham battles, and the holding of concerts at which amateur dramatic groups acted plays and sang songs. A small dance-hall was built from the ruins of an old farm-house given by Mr. Michael Sammon. Irish classes were started, and an effort made to revive the language, which seemed to be dying out. Unfortunately, the disastrous 'flu epidemic put an end to this.

In addition to the Volunteers, a *slua* of Fianna boy scouts was formed under Tommie Gannon, who was born in Leeds, but went to school here. When a letter addressed to "T. Gannon, Owenwee," was seized by the British, a party of military raided the townland. Apparently thinking that the name should be "Timothy or Pat", they inquired for Timothy Gannon; a local woman whom they questioned answered truthfully that no such person existed, and Tommie, not being Irish, politely refused the invitation to "come into the parlour".

About this time three men of Irish descent, prominent in American political circles, Messrs. Walsh, Ryan and Dunne, came to Europe as delegates to plead Ireland's case before the Peace Conference being held in Paris. They first paid a visit to Mr. Lloyd-George, the British Premier, who gave them permission to visit any part of Ireland they wished, to investigate conditions there. The Volunteers were expecting their arrival, and together with Volunteers from Cushlough and Aughagower, marched after them towards Westport. As Westport had been declared a military area, they were stopped at Knappagh by a unit of soldiers with fixed bayonets in an armoured car; the officer in charge refused to let them pass. With them were Fr. O'Flanagan and Richard Mulcahy, both prominent in the Sinn Féin movement. As the Delegates tried to parley with the military, the Volunteers, many of whom carried haversacks, but were unarmed, pressed closer to the soldiers. John Lavelle of Aughagower was carrying a tricolour to which an American flag was attached. This was a breach of international etiquette, as no other flag should

be attached to Old Glory, but the Volunteers were not aware of this.

Suddenly an officer rushed up with a group of riflemen to join a soldier who was tapping his rifle nervously on the road as he faced the Volunteers. "Get a move on here," the officer ordered brusquely; the soldiers promptly charged with fixed bayonets. As the Volunteers fell back, there was a sound of tearing cloth; a tall British soldier had put his bayonet through the Stars and Stripes. Manus Keane, a veteran of the Land War, had the haversack cut from his shoulders with a bayonet. There is little doubt that the action of the soldier was meant as a gesture of contempt towards Britain's ally in the Great War. The torn flag was later said to have been sent to President Wilson, but there is no record of any protest in the matter.

Although guerilla warfare was being actively waged in the South, no action had yet been carried out in County Mayo. *An tÓglach*, the organ of the Volunteers, commented that if other parts of Ireland were as active as the South, it would take twice as many enemy soldiers to keep the country in subjection, adding, "These, although technically available at present, he cannot conveniently spare from elsewhere".

In the meantime, the older Fianna boys were transferred to the Volunteer Company. On being transferred, we held up our right hands and took the following oath —

> I do solemnly swear that I do not and shall not yield a voluntary support to any pretended Government, Authority or Power within Ireland hostile or inimical thereto, and I do further swear that to the best of my knowledge and ability I will support and defend the Irish Republic and the Government of the Irish Republic, which is Dáil Éireann, against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and that I will bear true allegiance to the same, and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, so help me God."

We were also given a pledge against intoxicating drink.

One winter's night, as we amused ourselves by sliding on a pond, we got a sudden order to mobilize, and were marched across the mountains to Cushlough, where a sham battle was carried out. Afterwards we were lined up and addressed by the Batt. Comdt., Joe Ring. He told us that he hoped the time would soon come when we would go into action, and spoke about the importance of the safe delivery of dispatches, which would be the duty of the Volunteers who were not members of the Flying Column. He then read, with the aid of a flash-lamp, which was the first one I had seen, a dispatch which stated — "The Crown Forces at Westport Quay have a life-sized photograph of you. If captured, you will be shot, and your body dragged through the streets of Westport. This information comes direct from Military headquarters".

As soon as arms became available, Owenwee was chosen as the centre of supplies. It was regarded as the safest place because the Murrisk police, who were responsible for the district, had all resigned as a protest against Conscription. This effort to force Irishmen into the British Army had been defeated a few years earlier by the united action of priests and people, without bloodshed. A monster meeting was held on the Octagon, Westport. A large placard on the Town Hall read, "Death before Conscription". Among the speakers were Fr. McDonnell, Newport, and Pat Doris, Editor of the *Mayo News*.

The arms were brought to Owenwee by Quarter Master Tommie Ketterick and Vol. John McDonagh in Breheny's lorry. They contained a varied assortment; Mauser and Martini rifles, a few Lee-Enfields, Webley and Bulldog revolvers, Parabellum and German Luger pistols, called "Peter the Painters", a gas-mask and a suitcase full of hand grenades. They were taken care of by Capt. John Kearns, Adjt. Peter Joyce, myself and other Volunteers, as occasion demanded. Three others held the rank of Captain at different periods. They were John McLoughlin, Thomas McLoughlin, and Dominick McGreal, whose house was later made Column headquarters by Comdt. Michael Kilroy.

The arms were later distributed among the Active Service Unit, which at first numbered thirty-five men under Comdt. Joe Ring and Vice-Comdt. Broddie Malone. They were joined by Newport Batt. under Comdt. Michael Kilroy to become West Mayo Flying Column under Kilroy's leadership. With the care of arms off their hands, the men of "B" Coy. could now turn their attention to road-cutting.

III

The War of Independence

On a summer's night in 1921 Capt. Kearns had got orders to cut the road at Knappagh. Armed with picks and shovels, the Company met at Brackloon Wood. The Captain brought the main body of Volunteers with him, leaving behind three men, Lieut. Michael Sammon, Vol. James Kerrigan and myself, with orders to go back for more tools and wait at a small culvert, known locally as Jennings' Bridge, which was to be destroyed later. Having secured the tools, we settled down to await the return of our commander.

Standing in the shadow of a huge boulder, for some obscure reason known as Pussahaun Rock, we chatted in low tones; not of ambushes or the Republic, but about dances, lovers' quarrels, and all the fickle affairs of the young, which we vainly believed to be our own secrets. We did not realize, as we talked about loosening the keystone of the culvert, that we were helping to undermine the foundation of the greatest empire the world has ever known. The fact that the roar of a Crossley tender and a burst of gunfire from well-trained hands might shatter our youthful dreams did not deter us. We were scarcely aware of our part in a drama which would change the course of history.

The night was calm, there was no sound to break the stillness except when the harsh note of the corncrake disturbed the gentle murmur of the river, or the drone of some winged insect sounded for a moment before fading away over the wood. The world seemed truly to be at peace. As if to complete the picture of tranquility, the moon, like a great red disk, had risen by midnight above

the rugged eastern horison. As conversation lagged, we became drowsy. Suddenly Sammon gave an exclamation: "Look! Can you see the man?" Clearly silhouetted against the moon, there appeared the figure of a man, and another and another, until about a dozen forms had darkened the face of the moon. We watched fascinated as this ghostly party of "Spacemen" disappeared into the darkness. We were uneasy, as we knew that the Column had just left Bohea, towards which the phantom party seemed to be moving. What if it were the "Black and Tans"? We were not armed, so there was no way by which we could delay or intercept such a unit. Cautiously we made our way up the old Bohea road to where we knew the sentry post used to be, but there was no sharp challenge; all was silent as the grave.

In the meantime, the Captain and his men had reached their destination. Sentries were posted on either side, and the work of cutting the road began. As police might alert enemy forces, it was decided that, at the approach of danger, the sentry was to give a sharp whistle of two notes, like the cry of a wild bird. This familiar sound, passed quickly from man to man, would throw the Crown forces off their guard.

The men went to work promptly, and soon the hard surface of the road was torn away. At that moment a curlew, disturbed by unfamiliar sounds in its native haunts, called plaintively to its mate as it rose over the silent moorland. There was the clink of bars being dropped and the shuffle of feet in a quick rush for cover, but no roar of a Crossley or gunfire raking the surrounding hillocks; only the mocking notes of the frightened bird, as it soared away into the darkness, told the roadcutters that their code had been broken by the instinct of wildlife.

After a hearty laugh at their own discomfiture, the Volunteers returned to complete their work, but by this time the first party to have received the bogus signal had reached the point of no return. They formed the moonlight party which had alarmed the watchers at Pussahaun

Rock. Needless to say, at the next mobilization, they received mock congratulations on their "strategic withdrawal"!

In the ensuing months, "B" Coy. area was regularly visited by the Column. Their activities were not always directed towards warfare. There had to be some amusement to relax the strain on those boys, who were all marked men, and knew what to expect if they fell into enemy hands. The fighting men of other lands, like Paul Revere's Minute-Men, who levied war against their king, and the rebel Confederates of the American Civil War, were, for the most part, treated as prisoners of war if captured; but for the Irish soldier captured in battle there was no Hague Convention.

Let us look in on a scene that has become part of Ireland's history. The location is the home of Mr. Thomas Joyce, Owenwee, and from it comes the sound of music, laughter, and the tap of dancing feet. Some of the dancers are in the field-green uniform of the Volunteers, but most of them wear sports jackets and riding breeches, having trench-coats for outdoor wear. All have pistols or revolvers in holsters strapped to their waists. A pile of rifles and shotguns leans against the "out-shot" bed. Dark-haired Tom Ainsworth sits on the hob by the open fire-place as he sings —

Raise it aloft on the breeze, boys,
The watchword, the grandest we've known,
That Labour must rise from its knees, boys,
And claim the broad earth as its own!

At the call of "Who is next?" an athletic figure wearing a Sam Browne belt springs to attention to recite —

My rifle is as bright as my true-love's eye,
I'm happy and gay and free.
Why should I give a damn for England's laws?
I'm an outlaw rapparee!"

Comdt. Joe Ring is entertaining the boys.

Jimmy Flaherty, the indomitable Connaught Ranger who turned their own Lewis gun on the Crown forces at Carrowkennedy, sings "Skibbereen", Comdt. Chambers sings "The Road to Castlebar". The air is vibrant with laughter and gaiety.

Yet they dance in the shadow of death. Gentle, refined Jim MacEvilly is soon to give his life for Ireland, as also are laughing, light-hearted John Collins, Paddy Jordan, P. Staunton and Thomas O'Donnell. In little more than a year, comrades will be divided in a tragic war of brothers, but these pages of the Book of Fate have yet to be written, so the boys dance and sing with the carefree abandon of youth.

As the dancers returned to their billets that night, they could see the glare of Verey-lights brighten the sky over Westport. Those were the signal used to call for reinforcements. Three Volunteers had left the dance-house and attacked a police patrol at the Red Bridge near the railway station, wounding four R.I.C. men.

The Column, on their next visit to Owenwee, planned an attack on British forces, who were expected to come from Leenane, at Brackloon Bridge. The Vice-Comdt., Broddie Malone, took up one position along the wood wall which was loop-holed on Brackloon side. Comdt. Joe Ring placed his men along Bohea hill on the opposite side. Joe Baker planned to bomb the convey farther down the road. Vehicles on the road would come under fire from both sections at the same time. Capt. Kearns, Capt. Tom Mc Loughlin, Lieut. John Gibbons, Vol. Austin Judge and myself joined the ambush party; Vols. Tom Gannon and Tom Walsh took up duty on the Leenane side.

A tense situation developed when a boy from Knappagh inadvertently drove his cows into the ambush position. After a conversation with the Batt. Comdt., he was allowed to go home with his dangerous secret. He was the only person outside the Volunteers to know that an ambush was being prepared. The Column, however, left before the Crown forces arrived, in response to a dispatch from the

South Mayo Column Comdt., and the local Volunteers returned to their homes.

"B" Coy. was fortunate in having a military instructor who had served in the British Army. Pat Gannon of Leeds had acquired a great deal of information about arms that was invaluable to the Volunteers. Later he joined the Column, and served up to the Truce.

On May 19, 1921, an ambush which had disastrous consequences for the Volunteers was carried out in Kilmeena. It was here that the five men mentioned lost their lives. It seems that the plans of the ambush party were foiled by the unexpected appearance of a party of nuns in a car, which unknowingly drove through the ambush position just before the arrival of the Military. The Volunteers, fearing that they might make a tragic error of identity, allowed the first lorry to pass through unharmed. When the second vehicle was attacked, the members of the unit in the first one, hearing the shots, returned to the aid of their comrades, and found themselves to the rear of a section of the ambush party.

There was, naturally, a great difference in personality and temperament between the leaders with whom I came in contact during the campaign. Michael Kilroy, the Column Comdt. (later Divisional Comdt.) seemed studious and religious. He spoke in slow, measured tones, as if he had weighed up the consequences of each statement made. He had flashing eyes which were in sharp contrast to his slowly delivered speech. He was a man who would command respect among strangers. Joe Ring, the Batt. Comdt., I thought rather impatient. He was essentially a man of action. When not on parade, he could relax, and was a good mixer. Broddie Malone, the Batt. Vice-Comdt., who looked good in uniform, had a pleasant disposition that had something commanding about it. Tommie Ketterick, the Quarter Master, was the laughing boy, who seemed to treat the most serious business as a joke, and always assured us that we were "On the eve of the Republic". Stories are told about how he used to fraternize with mem-

bers of the Crown forces, and treat them to whiskey, in order to divert suspicion from the contents of his suit-case.

In the interests of historical accuracy, I now quote, with the kind permission of the *Western People*, and its staff reporter, Mr. Anthony Lavelle, from a series of articles entitled "West Mayo's Fighting Story", published by him in 1964:

Thousands gathered outside the Church of the Holy Rosary as the coffin of Jim McEvilly, draped in the tri-colour, was carried out to the hearse. A British officer, bearing the rank of Lieutenant, ordered the removal of the flag. Those in charge of the funeral refused and an ugly situation developed. The officer was moving towards the hearse to remove the tricolour. Fearing that he would be resisted for insulting the National Flag and that the soldiers would open fire on the crowd, Rev. Geoffrey Prendergast, C.C., Castlebar, a native of Accony, Louis-burgh, and who also served as a Chaplain in the British Army during the Great War, and held the rank of Captain, rushed over to the hearse to remove the flag. The British officer shouted, "Stand back!" Fr. Geoffrey told him to have respect for his superior officer and produced his commission. The officer saluted, and Fr. Prendergast re-moved the flag and gave it to a relative. Later the British officer called to the Presbytery and apologised to Fr. Prendergast.

When the wounded men were looked after in Augha-golla, Michael Kilroy held a conference with his staff and it was decided that they could not stay where they were, within the triangle of three towns — Castlebar, Newport and Westport — and they could not do the long march back to Aughagower. It was decided to retreat to a village called Skirdagh in the mountains below Newport, where they would have cover and see the search parties of the enemy when they came in pursuit.

Putting the three wounded men on horseback, the Column moved off towards Derryloghan via Weir Bridge on the Newport River to Skirdagh. The wounded were

left in McDonnell's in Skirdagh Upper, while the column men were billeted in Dyar's, Dever's and other houses in Lower Skirdagh. Eight men stayed in Cloonchifinna, where Jack Mullarkey gave every assistance. While they were there Jim Moran and Jack Connolly went home to Tiernaur to visit their people and reassure them that they had not been killed in Kilmeena, as was widely rumoured. They returned during the night and remained outside McDon-nell's.

At 3 a.m. on the 23rd of May, as the weary column men slept, P. Lambert and M. Naughton of Westport, who were on sentry duty, noticed large numbers of police making their way up the mountain path. Naughton opened fire on them to make them take cover, while Lambert had only time to waken the column. Michael Kilroy and Connolly went down and were fired on. They replied from cover. Tom Ketterick and Paddy Connor, aroused by the shots, went out to keep back the enemy. All the I.R.A. men got into position and fought a battle with the police, during which Jim Browne of Kilmeena was killed. Some of the enemy were killed and wounded.

When the engagement opened, Ned Moane, J. D. Gib-bons, B. Cryan and P. McLoughlin took the three wounded men (J. Chambers, J. Hughes and J. Swift) on horseback through Glenlura to Letterkeen in Shramore area.

While Swift was in the house, Dr. Madden laid him out on a kitchen table and, with Michael Kilroy administering the anaesthetic, he amputated three of his toes, damaged by a bullet in Kilmeena. Kilroy, Madden, Jack McDonnell, Cannon and P. J. Gibbons protected the main body as they made their way into the mountains.

From their positions at Letterkene, British military could be seen arriving at Skirdagh School and beginning to move up the mountain in an effort to surround the Column. The wounded had to be moved further into the Ballycroy moun-tains, to a place called Creevagh. In this operation Green Chambers and William Chambers, Shramore, were valuable guides in the mountain passes. They advised the I.R.A. on

the way to take, so that they would not be surrounded by troops coming out from Castlebar and Ballina. The Column men had to lie in cover for hours as an aeroplane sent out from the base in Castlebar circled the mountains. A number of men of the R.A.F. had an aerodrome near Castlebar, in the field now owned by the Mental Hospital. They were there until 1922. They had about four planes and went off every day to circle for hours over the Windy Gap, Lahardane, and the Nephin mountains. A number of them crashed trying to land, and the pilots were killed.

In order to draw the enemy away from Michael Kilroy and his hard pressed men, Eamon Moane and his companions, guided by Willie Chambers of Shramore, raided an auction in Mulranny where the goods of a well-known English supporter were being sold. T. M. Joyce, Westport, was auctioneer, and Miss A. Gallagher was his clerk.

Michael Kilroy and his men kept going. At one time, in the darkness, they were hiding behind a stack of turf when a lorry of British troops halted on the road near them. The officer in charge of the troops had a torch out looking at maps of the area and the column men nearly got caught when laughing at the officer trying to pronounce local names. Going across a bog Madden fell into a bog-hole. The rearguard had only crossed a bridge when the English put a guard on it.

In the Skirdagh fight a Head Constable was killed and a Constable wounded. D. I. Munro of Newport was wounded. He was a fair man, and he had prevented the Tans from burning houses in Skirdagh village when they knew they had to deal only with women and old men. Another R.I.C. man, named Sergeant O'Brien, told the I.R.A. that they had heard that there were wounded men in Upper Skirdagh. They were gone when the police arrived. When darkness came, the Column men came down and had a good feed of boiled salmon, bread and tea. The poached fish came in handy.

When they got to Keenagh village the wounded were given women's clothes by the Hegarties and posed as a

wedding party on the way to Glenisland, which was a safe retreat for the Castlebar Column. They were on a side-car, and the driver was an ex-R.I.C. man who had resigned some time before. When they came to Boughadoon, scouts sent out by Luke Sheridan, I.O. Castlebar Batt., informed them that the Border Regiment from Castlebar had held up a cross-roads to the south on the way to Glenisland. The driver went by the Windy Gap road and to safety in Castlebar. A Tan lorry deliberately ran down and killed a Fianna Scout as he was going with a dispatch on the Pontoon road. He was Jackie Barrett, son of Nurse Barrett of Market Square, Castlebar.

In this round-up by thousands of troops and police no I.R.A. man was captured, and the British reported that the Column, numbering 500, had vanished into the mountain mists. The enemy, enraged at their failure, arrested all the men under 70 they could find, and brought them into local schools, where they beat them with rifles and revolver butts and kicked them, trying to get information out of them, but they failed. In a week Kilroy and his men were billeted in Clady village, behind Croagh Patrick, waiting for the next move.

Before dangerous engagements the Column men assembled at the house of Mrs. Geraghty, Bunrawer, Ayle, Westport, where Fr. McHugh, C.C., Aughagower, heard their confessions, offered Mass and gave them Holy Communion. As a result, Fr. McHugh was visited by three lorry loads of Black and Tans under Major-General Cruise and questioned. The General is reported to have said: "Even though I am a Catholic myself, if I had any proof that you gave confession to these rebels, I'd shoot you where you stand with my own gun and burn square miles of this parish!" Remembering how the Tans took out Fr. Griffin in Galway and murdered him, Fr. McHugh did not sleep at home afterwards.

An amusing story was sent to me of how Tom Ketterick got the rifles into Westport. This is how it was told. Tom had 12 rifles to get through from Dublin, and he travelled

to Galway with James Gibbons of Mullagh, a draper's traveller, who had large hampers in which he carried his samples. They arrived in Galway all right, and Tom put the rifles under his bed in the hotel. A man sleeping in the same room was a Black and Tan, but Tom kept calm, and he and Gibbons got the rifles on the train to Maam Cross.

When nearing the station, Gibbons looked out and saw three or four R.I.C. men on the platform. "We are finished!" said Gibbons, but Tom, who was as cool as ice, said, "Leave it to me". Tom got up and went up to the Sergeant of the R.I.C., shook him by the hand and told him he was coming home from Dublin to his home in Mayo, as he could not stand the awful times up in Dublin. "Ambushes, you know. By the Shinners, you know, Sergeant. Terrible place, Dublin. Come up to Peacocke's and have a drink, and bring the boys." So they went up. The Sergeant stood a round, and Tom stood, and they became friends.

Then Tom told the Sergeant how his friend the traveller was looking for some way to get his samples into Mayo. The Sergeant told him the only motor car there was one they, the police, used to get themselves, and offered to get it. Back the Sergeant came with the car, and helped to load the samples on to it. He then warned Tom that there was a lot of Tans at Maam, and to be careful. Tom thanked him and drove off in the direction of Maam but, when the Sergeant was out of sight, he turned towards Recess and on to Kylemore. In that way the rifles reached West Mayo.

After escaping through the British net, Michael Kilroy and his Active Service Column came together at Tonlagee, Aughamore, towards the end of May. On the night of May 31, 1921, the Column moved across Curvey and Lanmore to the village of Oughty, where they remained all day on June 1. That night Michael Kilroy took fifteen men with him, and went to the village of Drummin, which lies across the bogs from Carrowkennedy, and burned the R.I.C. barracks there. The Column then moved across the bogs to

Derrykellew village, where they were often sheltered. Some of the boys called to McGovern's and Tunney's, where they were always welcome. While the Column was located in Curvey, in the house of Tom Ludden, the Duffy brothers went home for supplies, and were nearly captured in a raid on their own house. On the morning of June 2 the Column arrived in the village of Clady, and four men from the Louisburgh Batt. joined them there. They were Paddy Kelly, O.C., Dan Sammon, J. Harney and P. McNamara. Previous to this, a trench had been cut in the road south of Carrowkennedy dance hall by Capt. John Kearns, Owenwee, and his company.

At about 3 o'clock on that day sentries reported that three lorries and a car were pulled up near the dance hall and the Tans, with fixed bayonets, were rounding up turf workers, and compelling them to empty their carts to fill the trench so that the lorries could cross over. It was first assumed that the enemy forces were going to Letterfrack, as there was a fair to be held there the next day. As a bridge on the road from Ashlea to Louisburgh had been broken, the officers of the Column knew that the Tans would have to return the same way. When the lorries were gone, Michael Kilroy decided to attack them on the return journey at Carrowkennedy, on the main road between Westport and Leenane. Temporary positions were taken up while Michael Kilroy, Joe Ring and Dr. Madden looked for better ones in the direction of Thomas Navin's. Broddie Malone was in charge of the Westport Unit, assisted by Johnnie Duffy and Joe Baker. Jack Connolly and Jim Moran had charge of the Newport boys. The only Castlebar man present was Paddy Cannon. The arms of the Column consisted of 16 rifles, two shotguns and a few revolvers. They had a few home-made bombs of a very primitive type. They had about 800 rounds of rifle ammunition, 25 per shotgun, and 12 rounds per revolver.

Broddie Malone placed his men on a rise of ground 150 yards from the road, on the left as one goes to Leenane. On that side were the remains of the old police hut which

was burned, and further back Widow Sammon's house. The first section was placed on the Westport side of the police hut and the second section was placed on the Leenane side of the hut. The third section of ten men was situated behind Widow McGreal's house on the side of the road. There was good cover for all the men in the sections, as in front of them were stone walls, in which they made loop-holes for guns. There was also cover for one section to communicate with the others. The men had just prepared their positions when a shout was raised that the lorries were coming a quarter of a mile away at Darby Hastings' pub.

In a few minutes the first lorry shot round the turn. It received a volley from the I.R.A. rifles. It wavered and came to rest against a fence. Inspector Stephenson, who was in charge of the convoy, was shot at the wheel. He had taken over from the driver a short time before. The regular driver, who was seated beside him, was also shot dead. Before the convoy left Westport, a local R.I.C. Sergeant was to sit beside the driver, but the D.I. ordered him to stay in the barrack, took his place and went to his death. The Tans in the lorry jumped out and took cover beside the roadside ditch. This group had a machine gun, which opened up on the I.R.A. positions. Soon an I.R.A. marksman got the range, and the gunner got a bullet through the brain. Another who took his place met the same fate. A third man who took over the gun fell dead from the bullet of a Column sniper. From that on, no man risked touching the gun. The other two vehicles came to a halt in front of Mrs. McGreal's house ,and were fired on from both sides of the road. The police jumped out in an attempt to rush the I.R.A. positions, but were driven back.

The police took possession of the house, and prepared it for resistance until reinforcements could arrive. They poked rifles through the front windows and the window in the gable, which controlled a view down the Westport road. They used up all their ammunition, and wanted more from the lorry. They asked Mrs. McGreal to go to the lorry for it, but she refused. Then they told her to send

her young son and assured her the I.R.A. would not fire on him. The widow would not let her young son go, and shouted, "Go out and get it yourselves and leave the boy alone. It is your ammunition!" To the I.R.A. she shouted: "Fire away, lads. Give it to them!"

The police now started shelling the I.R.A. positions with rifle grenades, but they fell short. The motor car halted beyond the cottage, and five policemen jumped out. Jimmy Flaherty of Westport, who had been nine years in the Connaught Rangers, was the farthest Column man, and as a policeman from the car came near him, he fired and saw him fall.

Edward Moane, Johnnie Gibbons and others had, by this time, taken up positions on the Westport side of Carrowkennedy, to intercept any reinforcements that might come from Westport, where the sound of the shots could be heard. The fight was dragging on, and the ammunition supply of the Column was running out. The Black and Tans were holding out, although their position was hopeless. Michael Kilroy was worried, as he feared reinforcements would arrive at any time. He decided that nothing less than an assault on the enemy position would give him victory and the much-needed war materials. After consulting with Malone, Kilroy decided the lorry would have to be rushed. Johnnie Duffy, his brother, Paddy, the youngest man in the Column, and Jack Keane were to advance on the right flank. Joe Baker, "Ladeen" Hogan and Tommie Ainsworth were to move down on the right. Tom Heavey and Jack McDonagh moved in to support them. The rest of the Column gave sustained covering fire, and watched the assault on the lorry. As the assault party advanced on the lorry, a rifle grenade that was being fired from it fell back into it, killing two policemen and wounding R.I.C. Sergeant Creegan.

A white flag of surrender was seen flying from the lorry, and the Column men came and took their arms. Only one of the police was unwounded. He was hiding under the bank, and had not fired a shot.

The Column men were delighted with the machine gun, which had beaten them in Kilmeena, and realized they would be on more equal terms with the enemy in the future. Madden brought the machine gun up to Flaherty, who was an expert gunner in the Great War, and he found it in perfect order. When Broddie came down he saw that the door of Widow Sammon's house was open. He feared for her safety, as the house was raked with cross-fire all day. When he entered he found the widow uninjured, and seated by the fire smoking a pipe. A door was taken from her house, and the wounded police were carried on it up to her house to receive first aid. Having suffered when evicted, the widow at first refused to let the police in, but was eventually persuaded to make hot drinks for the wounded, and provided blankets to make them comfortable.

The police were still holding out in Widow McGreal's house, and had to be got out quickly. Flaherty, an expert gunner, set up the Lewis gun and trained it on the house. After a few bursts of fire through the door, Joe Baker called on them to release the widow and her son. This they refused to do. They were warned that if anything happened to the widow or her son, they would be held responsible. They were told that if they did not surrender, the prisoners might be shot. Sergeant Hanlon refused to surrender. Then Jimmy Flaherty opened up with the machine gun, made a sieve of the door, cut the thatch of the roof, and broke every pane of glass in the windows. Soon a rifle with a dish-cloth attached was shoved out the window, and the firing stopped. Then fourteen police came out with their hands over their heads, and were taken prisoner.

The I.R.A. went into Widow McGreal's cottage to collect the arms, and the widow made light of the damage. She said the many holes in the door would make the house fine and airy. The prisoners were frightened looking, especially the Tans, as they considered that their raids on the houses of the Column men in Westport were enough to condemn them. They did not know whether the I.R.A. would shoot them or not. They knew an order had come

out from I.R.A. H.Q. that all Tans were to be shot on sight. Sergeant Hanlon asked for a priest in case they would be shot. One of the Column officers asked Kilroy would they shoot them and Michael replied: "No. We can't do that, our nature is not hard enough". The prisoners' wounds were dressed, and they were given cigarettes and refreshments. A policeman was sent to Westport on a bicycle to tell them to send out a doctor to attend to the wounded, and bring them and their dead comrades in to the barracks. Four police had been killed, and four wounded. Petrol was spilled over the lorries, and they were burned. When the policeman arrived at the barracks, the Barrack Orderly refused to let him in. He then shouted, "They are all dead in Carrowkennedy". He was then allowed in, and fell on the floor.

Before the police and Tans left for Westport, Michael Kilroy spoke to them and warned them that reprisals on houses would mean that their own houses would be burned first, and that others would follow. If there was any shooting of I.R.A. or civilians as a result of this encounter, the captured police would be held responsible; and if I.R.A. wounded were not respected in future, it would be hard on any police captured.

The I.R.A. immediately set about collecting all arms and equipment. The haul yielded 25 rifles, one Lewis machine-gun, 28 revolvers, 60 hand grenades, 5,000 rounds of .303 and 500 rounds of revolver ammunition, as well as much materiel.

Having sent messengers to Westport to get doctors and priests for the enemy wounded, the men of the Column, hungry and tired, and loaded down with arms, marched back to Clady, where they enjoyed a hearty meal. That night they were on the move again to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the enemy. They moved west through the villages of Derryherbert and Lecanvey. From there they could see the first enemy from Castlebar searching for them around Carrowkennedy. It was only when the area was searched from the air that help was

sent for the wounded. The next day the unit arrived in Durless and Culleen areas. Pat Joyce of Durless gave the Column a hearty welcome, and to celebrate the victory killed two sheep. They were also welcomed by Black Pat Joyce, Eddie Kelly, Brian Scahill and Tom Fergus, Culleen.

Captain Tom Fergus and A. Harney took charge of outposts. They sent local men up the mountain pretending to look for sheep, but actually keeping a look out for the enemy. While the Column was safely passing the time in the west, the British forces carried out a thorough search of the Tourmakeady area. Peter O'Malley of Clady, who spoke with a pronounced English accent, having told the British that the I.R.A. had gone that way, was thanked and praised for his help. The troops then turned their attention to the west, and when they got on the track of the Column they relentlessly followed them for a month over half Mayo, but always a day behind.

The Column spent a few days in Crigaun and Aillmore villages near Louisburgh. All the time local men and members of Cumann na mBan kept alert for any sign of the enemy. As this area was bounded by the sea, it was unsafe to remain long, since the unit could be surrounded. It was decided to move on again to Delphi and Glenamurra and through the Erriff valley, through Aughagower, Killawalla and on to Derryloghran north east of Newport. All the way scouts reported on the movements of British troops so that the Column could keep a jump ahead of them. The British, who did not know the way, and were sent astray by friendly people, got lost many times. Sometimes the Column men were led at night through the British lines. When in Collabinna at the foot of Nephinmore, they got word that large enemy forces had surrounded the Newport area. Although they suffered beatings and were tortured, the wonderful people refused to disclose the whereabouts of the Column.

With the enemy close behind, the weary men of the unit arrived at Derrymartin in the Boughadoon area. It was here that the late J. J. Leonard took the famous photograph of the Column, which included practically all the men on active service, except some who were on sentry duty. These included Paddy Duffy, Joe Baker and John Berry. From there they moved on to the other side of Addergoole Parish.

The place is steeped in history. In 1798 the victorious Franco-Irish army marched through here to capture Castlebar. The local people made them as welcome as the I.R.A., and sent them by the Bearna Gaoithe or Windy Gap to surprise the Red Coats who were watching the Foxford road. Fr. Conroy, parish priest of this place, was hanged on the Green in Castlebar because he was friendly with the French officers. Following the steps of General Humbert and his army, the Column men went through Laragan, Gort and rested in Crimlin village. Captain Staunton of the Crimlin Company billeted the men in the houses around, while he and his Volunteers kept watch.

While sleeping in the villages of Gort and Laragan, scouts reported that the villages were being surrounded by large forces of military. It was 3 o'clock in the morning, and the men had only time to get up and take up defensive positions. All the men were called except Paddy Duffy and Richard Joyce, who slept in Rowland's through all the excitement. There were 25 houses in the villages, and 24 of them were raided. When darkness fell, the I.R.A. slipped through the enemy lines. From there the Column men went to Shunnagh in the Parke area, where a large amount of poteen was made. The Parke Company was responsible for security. The next stop was Carracastle near Bohola, where a dance was organized for the Column by the boys and girls of the area. The Column then passed through Kiltimagh, and were billeted in the villages of Prizon and Tawnagh, near Balla, where they were again made welcome. While resting there, word came that the British were on the way, and the Column had to go on the move again. Moving on towards Aughagower, they spent nights in the following villages: Cloonsunnagh, near Errew Monastery; Bawnogues, Buncam and Devlish, arriving at Ton-

lagee on the 2nd of July, a month after the Carrowkennedy Ambush.

While there, Tom Ludden of Curvey brought word from Luke Sheridan, I.O., Castlebar, that large forces of British troops were closing in on them. These troops had encamped at Killawalla. This made the men move to Lanmore. It was now getting like a game of chess with Mayo as the board, for, soon after arriving at Lanmore, Tom Ludden came with word that another enemy camp had been set up at the Ballinrobe road, at Colloughra Bridge. On the move again, the Column set out to get back to Owenwee, Westport, stopping at Crickahinny and Trianlaur on the way. All that Sunday news kept arriving of troops pouring into Westport. That evening the military set up a camp at Brackloon Bridge, a mile from Owenwee, where the Column was resting.

I now take over from the *Western People* and its kindly reporter, Mr. Anthony Lavelle.

When Comdt. Michael Kilroy led his Column of approximately fifty men into Owenwee, events were moving rapidly to a climax. Contact had been made between the British and Irish leaders, with a view to peace talks, but only a few persons were aware of this. The Column was being quickly surrounded by hundreds of well armed troops backed up by air support. To engage such forces in combat would be suicidal. The unit was lined up along a mountain stream with the local company, where furze bushes gave only meagre cover. Although the men seemed to be cornered and hopelessly outnumbered, there was no sign of panic. Local wags mimicked the slow, serious tones of the Column Comdt. as he summed up the situation!

The leaders conferred to decide on further action, and retired with the men to the home of William Kearns. Finally they decided to dump their arms and break up into small groups which would form a lesser target for their formidable enemy, until more favourable conditions permitted a resumption of hostilities. "B" Coy. would take care of the arms until such time arrived. With powerful

enemy forces less than a mile away at Brackloon Bridge, prompt action was necessary if the Column was to be saved from annihilation. Reliable guides to lead the sections over ground unfamiliar to men of other areas were the first requirement. Vol. Austin Judge was picked to pilot Comdt. Kilroy and other leaders across the Sheaffry Hills near Leenane. The guide was well chosen. There was no pass in that rugged terrain with which young Judge was not familiar. Often had he roamed its dizzy slopes to seek some wayward mountain sheep which had failed to return to the fold; tonight he was to lead a band of outlaws, like the un-named youth who had guided the footsteps of Red Hugh O'Donnell after his escape from Dublin Castle, centuries before.

As Kilroy's party followed their youthful guide over the trackless mountain that night, they could see far below them the crawling headlights of numerous British lorries and, much closer to them, the dancing figures of enemy searchlights, as they probed the silent ravines. When Austin returned home at dawn, he found his house full of British soldiers, but they had no reason to suspect that the nonchalant youth with the ash plant and the sheep-dog was a rebel. A younger brother, John, who joined a fighting Column in 1922, served later with the American Forces in the Philippine Islands. He went down with a Japanese prison ship, far away from the land he had loved and fought for. As the fighting men proceeded to break up into groups on that sultry summer's night of July 2, 1921, there were many hand-shakes and "Good-byes" as comrades parted. Some of them were loath to part with their rifles, but reassured to know they were in good hands. Tom Ketterick, who had a grenade thrower attached to his rifle, gave strict orders that the weapon be kept well oiled. A favourite song with the boys at the time was a new one with a light-hearted theme:

> **I'm forever blowing bubbles,**
> **Pretty bubbles in the air,**

They fly so high, they reach the sky;
Then like my dreams they fade and die.

Perhaps the verse was symbolic. Another phase of Ireland's long struggle for freedom was nearing its end.

On the morning of July 3, 1921, the scene had changed completely. Long before dawn, the beams of enemy searchlights, like great moving silver mirrors, swept across the countryside. Here and there little groups of local Volunteers, crouching in the shadows, played hide-and-seek with the death rays, and then stumbled on in the darkness with their heavy burdens of lead and steel. They were running a weird obstacle race against Time, and an enemy whose powerful forces encircled them with an ever-narrowing ring of steel.

As dawn broke, a shimmering forest of lances rose out of the mists, as heavy cavalry units moved swiftly up the narrow road. An observation plane flew low over the thatched farm houses, its occupants scanning the neighbourhood for any suspicious movement. Gruff voices ordered the people from their beds; they were herded together and questioned, in a futile effort to trace the elusive Army of the Republic. A typical approach was, "Do you want to get rich quickly? I'll give you two thousand pounds if you tell me where Joe Ring is". The troops were on the whole well behaved. No one was tortured, but the atmosphere was tense. Some of the arms were hidden almost in the path of the army. A section of soldiers grazing their horses in a hay-field while they rested seemed to be looking straight at the spot where most of the Irish guns were buried in a felt-covered coffin. Nothing was found despite the fact that the boys of "B" Coy. had only a few hours to carry out their dangerous duty.

A section of Newport Batt. who were being guided by Volunteers Michael McGreal and Michael Walsh, Prospect, still retained their rifles, and proposed to fight it out in a last desperate stand, but were persuaded by their Comdt., Josie Doherty, to hand over their guns to the local men,

who had still time to hide them before the raiders arrived. They escaped by boat to Mulranny.

In order to record the history of the time in its true perspective, I now revert to Mr. Anthony Lavelle's "Fighting Story" in the *Western People*:

One party was made up of Joe Baker, William Malone, Joe Walsh, Dan Gavin, Tom Heavey and P. Duffy. The adventures of this party are well worth recording. After leaving the others they made their way to Drummin. They decided that McGovern's in the Drummin bogs was the safest place on the earth, and arrived at about 1 a.m. About twenty minutes later the clatter of horses' hooves was heard, and the six men escaped over the garden wall. A few minutes later 25 cavalry men surrounded the house. The party proceeded to Letternaglinskin, and were followed for some distance by the soldiers, who saw their tracks in the dew on the grass. From Letternaglinskin, Baker took his men on to Sheaffry Hills behind Drummin, and as dawn broke they were asleep near McPherson's. A fire was noticed in the nearby garden, and P. Duffy went to investigate. He found that there was a camp of hundreds of soldiers. The six men started to creep away and P. Duffy became cut off from the rest, when six lorries of troops passed along the road between them, the last lorry coming to a halt. Duffy made his way to Kilmore to visit Pat Cox and found him sleeping on hay in a barn with his nine small children, his house having been burned down some time before by British forces. The Air Force was very active, planes flying low, observing all movements on the ground. The Military started to search Kilmore, and Duffy had to move to Derryherbert. Close to Derryherbert he noticed Military searching the village. He took cover in some whins and slept for some time.

On awaking he went to Flynn's of Derryurla, where he had something to eat. Mrs. Flynn told him to go to bed, and her husband said he would keep good watch. Flynn said there was no danger in such an out of the way place. Fifteen minutes later Duffy was called, as a strong enemy

force was advancing across the bogs from Lackdeirg. He had to escape through a window and hide in the garden. The search over, he went to Hoban's in Erriff. This was the house referred to earlier in this narrative where the "sermon in stone" was engraved on the pillar of the fireplace. Tom Hoban had carried wounded Volunteers on horseback across the mountains from Tourmakeady some time before. Here Paddy Duffy met Joe Baker and five other men, who had come by Tawnyard via Mark McDonnell's to Erriff. From there they went on again to Kearns' of Derrinkee, and were about to sit down to dinner when about 25 horse soldiers came around by Tunney's of Derrycraff, and proceeded in the direction of Derrinkee. However, before reaching there, they turned back, as the old coach road was impassable.

That night the group tried to cross the Slievemanagh mountains, but found the place covered with soldiers, who were shooting off Verey lights every few minutes. The men had to turn back and go on to Shraheen, arriving at Cusack's before dawn, where they got rest. The planes were out early that morning, but did not spot the men, who lay on some whins by the Shraheen river, and slept all day. They spent the next day at O'Donnell's of Aill, and then moved on to John Moran's of Deerpark on Thursday morning, but they saw only a few lorries of soldiers moving around and had a quiet day. That night they got socks from Tom Ludden, who was their storekeeper. On Friday morning military moved along the Curvey road from all the camps towards Castlebar for hours, and they were thankful that the pressure had been lifted.

While Kilroy's West Mayo Column was harrassing the superior Crown forces in its area, the men of South Mayo were not idle. The Intelligence Officer of the Brigade was always watching the movements of enemy troops and Black and Tans between barracks and posts. He informed the commanders of the times and dates of movements, and the number of troops or police in the various convoys. Most of the R.I.C. barracks had been burned by the I.R.A.

or evacuated and now the police, reinforced by Tans, occupied large barracks which had been fortified with sandbags and steel shutters with slits for rifles in them. It would therefore be foolish to attack them without artillery, which the I.R.A. did not possess. Such a barrack was situated at Derrypark on the Tourmakeady road. Local men in the Column, who had observed the movements of the enemy along this road, had reported that early each month a convoy of two lorries of troops brought pay and provisions for the garrison of Derrypark from Ballinrobe. Comdt. Tom Maguire, having examined the position, decided to attack the convoy. His force of thirty men, and some local men, was armed with shotguns and rifles. He decided to place them in three sections at three points along the road through the village. They were placed in good positions for attack, about 200 yards apart. Michael O'Brien, Tom Maguire and Paddy May of Ballinrobe were in command — one over each section.

The plan was to allow the first vehicle up to Drimbawn, and it was to be engaged by the section under Paddy May. The other two sections were to attack the second and third lorries. The first car came along and was allowed to pass two sections, then it was fired on by the third. The second lorry, containing about 12 police, travelled too far behind, and before it was in far enough, the men in it heard the shots at the first party. They took the warning, dismounted and ran for cover. The two other sections could not prevent them from entering a large hotel. They defended this position, being well supplied with ammunition and grenades. After an hour's fight Maguire saw that it would be impossible for his men to capture the enemy position or dislodge the defenders in a short time. If the attack lasted a long time, reinforcements might arrive and wipe out the Column. As the commander could not risk this, he ordered his men to withdraw.

Guided by local men, the little band of 30 moved to a strong position in the Partry Mountains, which they could defend until darkness covered their escape against rein-

forcements that might arrive. When they got up to higher ground it was seen that Maguire was right in giving up the fight. They saw lorries of troops coming from the direction of Ballinrobe and Galway. Machine guns began to spray the bare hills with a hail of bullets. The men of the Column decided to retreat towards Westport or Castlebar, but when they looked in that direction they found that lorries bearing more troops were coming from the two towns mentioned. They were surrounded and cut off on all sides. The only thing to do was to select a position that could be held until darkness gave them a chance to escape through the enemy lines. Maguire selected a position which gave cover to his men, but which could not be approached by the enemy without exposing himself to the fire of the I.R.A. The Column were accurate shots, and the soldiers advancing in the open lost many men. They raked the position held by the brave men of the Column with machine gun fire.

The men of the Column nearly lost heart when they saw their beloved leader hit by a burst from a Lewis gun, which shattered his arm. The Brigade Adjutant, Michael O'Brien, from the Neale, crawled to give him assistance, and was so engaged when a British officer, revolver in hand, came up behind the two of them and called on O'Brien to surrender. As O'Brien was turning to fire at him, the officer shot him dead. A Column man let the officer have both barrels of his shot gun, and he staggered back wounded and fell. It is said that he was wearing armour, which saved his life. A party of soldiers coming after him retreated when they saw their leader fall. The wounded officer crawled down to the nearest house, and compelled a man on a side car to bring him down to the main road. Although the Column's position was raked by machine gun and rifle fire, they held out, waiting for darkness to give them a chance to escape. When night came the enemy placed a ring of troops around the gallant band to keep them there until morning, when they would finish them off. Some of the I.R.A. silently knocked out a few

sentries and, under cover of darkness, escaped through the gap.

Comdt. Maguire, who was badly wounded, was carried to a nearby house, where he was attended by a Doctor Murphy and a Volunteer with a knowledge of first aid. He was kept in the village for a few days, and had to be moved to the mountain every time a raiding party appeared, and moved back again when the enemy had gone. When a chance came, he was moved to a place of safety, where he quickly recovered. This stand by 30 ill-armed men, untrained in the art of war, against 300 seasoned troops with experience in the recent war, will go down in history with the brave men who held the Bridge of Athlone against King William's army.

Considering the odds against them, the Column had only one officer killed and an officer and a Volunteer wounded. It is reported that at least ten of the enemy were killed and a number wounded. This may not be accurate and may be even greater, due to the fact that the British never gave correct figures of casualties suffered. Their official reports always stated that they were attacked by "Superior forces of the enemy and after a fight lasting for hours, they inflicted severe casualties on the I.R.A." Those reports and similar ones issued by the R.I.C. were deposited in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, and may be consulted by historians of the future, giving a distorted version of the War of Independence. Records like the present one, by men who were personally involved and knew the leaders, or were in a position to get the facts directly from those involved, should do a lot to counteract this. After the battles the men of the Column, seated around a good turf fire in some farm house, laughed at the reports issued to the newspapers by the British Government.

On the day of the Tourmakeady ambush, a section of West Mayo Column under Joe Ring lay in ambush at Brackloon. This has been described earlier in this book. When they heard that Maguire and his men were surrounded, they left their positions and marched to their aid. On

arrival at Derrycraff, they heard that the battle was over, and that Maguire and his men escaped. They heard also that Paddy King and Phil Hallinan of Glenmask had been captured at Partry, and were to be taken to the train at Ballinrobe. Plans were made to rescue them, but it was learned later that they had been taken by road to Claremorris. Paddy Moran, N.T., Glenmask, was the prime mover in the plan to rescue them.

* * *

Ballad of the Tourmakeady fight, carried out by South Mayo Flying Column, under Comdt. Tom Maguire, on May 3, 1921; composed by ~~Mr. Huets,~~ Tourmakeady:

Along the Partry Mountains, we had a dreadful day;
In war we were surrounded, all on the third of May.
My mind it was completely gone, it seemed to me a dream,
When bullets flew like hailstones
At Bealanidaun stream.

At Tholly-ard and Loregan, they're now on the record,
Our heroes won the battlefield, all praises to the Lord.
They fought like loyal Irishmen along the mountain-side —
May God be with them everywhere, and always be their guide.
The bullets they were whizzing 'round, and flying like the hail —
I often heard, "Success attend the sons of Granuaile!"
They drove away the enemy, in terror they did go;
It yields a lot of credit to the County of Mayo.

Upon the sides of Loregan, the Volunteers did say,
"Cheer up my gallant Irishmen, we now have won the day.
The soldiers we have conquered on the slopes of Roy-an-ore,
God is with us 'on the run' and will for evermore!"
A party of these soldiers came down by Loughaun Shee,
Their ranks were badly broken, and down they had to flee;
They joined in conversation, saying, "Now we've got our fill
Of all the Partry Mountains — they're worse than Vinegar Hill!"

It's now we join in chorus, and thank the Lord on High,
Who saved our brave Sinn Feiners when danger it was nigh;

They proved themselves St. Patrick's sons, no danger did they fear —
Long live the Tourmakeady boys and the Irish Volunteers!
The Volunteers were everywhere successful on that day,
Except for poor O'Brien, who fell all in the fray;
He died for dear old Ireland, the bravest of the brave,
May the Lord have mercy on his soul; he now lies in the grave.

IV

The Truce

ON JULY 11, 1921, eight days after the West Mayo Flying Column broke up in Owenwee, a truce between the Irish and British forces was agree to. It was signed on behalf of the Irish by Gen. Richard Mulcahy, and for the British by Gen. Sir Nevil McCready. The people could breathe freely again. The fighting men could return to their homes or walk the streets of Westport without fear of arrest. Small groups of Auxiliaries, easily recognized by their well oiled hair and superficial politeness, roamed the town in plain clothes, staring at the young men on the streets. The Volunteer uniform, which was now worn openly, seemed to fascinate them, although except for the colour and cap badge there was little difference between it and the British soldier's battle dress. They wished to know what sort of men dared to challenge their authority on "British territory", after many centuries of occupation. At the same time, they were anxious to meet Comdt. Michael Kilroy, the "Head Bloke" who had spared the lives of the prisoners in Carrowkennedy, despite an order from I.R.A. headquarters that all Auxiliaries should be shot when captured, as a reprisal for the execution of Volunteers captured by the British.

The signing of the truce created new difficulties for the leaders of the Volunteers. The following editorial from *An tÓglach* will give the reader some idea of them. The issue from which this extract is taken is dated Nov 11, 1921.

TRUCE CONDITIONS

The conditions produced by a prolonged period of truce

in Ireland involved serious disadvantages from the military point of view in the case of an army such as ours. The bracing tonic effects of the fight are absent; men who have been on active service are again leading civilian lives; they are subject on all sides to influences and temptations which are detrimental to that high moral discipline which our army has reason to pride itself upon. The hero-worship of friends is sometimes liable to give men "swelled head" and cause them to assume overbearing and consequential airs towards the civil population. Again, efforts are being made by friends to draw them into interference with local disputes — interference carried out in an irregular manner. The high-handed methods of dealing with people necessitated by war conditions are liable to be unjustifiably resorted to under present conditions. The greatest danger of all arises from excessive drinking. A drunken Volunteer is a worthless Volunteer; he injures and degrades himself, and he lowers the prestige of the army in the eyes of the civilian population. A drunken Volunteer carrying arms is a public danger.

We do not say that the evils referred to have arisen to any extent in our army during the truce times. Considering everything, the discipline and orderly conduct of our men during this period of suspended hostilities has been truly wonderful, and the number of "unpleasant incidents" reported has been far less than would be expected; but it is necessary to warn all Volunteers of the dangers of present conditions. Officers everywhere should keep an iron hand on their men. Drunkenness should be put down relentlessly. A Volunteer who cannot keep sober is of no use to us, and is better out of the army. It is the duty of officers to give their men a good example in this respect. Officers who frequent public houses for the purpose of drinking are not likely to hold the respect of their men. A recent army regulation provides for the reduction to the ranks of officers found guilty of continued indulgence in drink, after warning from their superior officers, and dismissal from the army of any Volunteer found guilty of the same.

Ned Moane, Jimmy Flaherty (gunner) and Michael Kilroy, with the Lewis gun taken from the British at the battle of ***Carrowkennedy***. Picture (copyright) by J. J. Leonard, Bofeenaun, Ballina

Free State armoured car and troops outside the Town Hall, Westport. Picture (copyright) by McLoughlin's Studios, Westport

The author,
Edward O'Malley,
on his
arrival in
the United States

FOLLOWING PAGES

The Flying Column

BACK ROW (left to right): *Comdt.-Gen. Michael Kilroy, Quarter Master Tommie Ketterick, Comdt. E. Moane, Capt. John Gibbons, Joe Walsh, P.J. Cannon, P. Lambert, J. Kelly, Comdt. Josie Doherty, Comdt. Broddy Malone, Jim Rush, Batt. Comdt. Joe Ring.*
MIDDLE ROW: M. Naughton, J. Hogan, J. Harney, Dan Sammon, Jack Keane, J. Connolly, Rick Joyce, Pat McNamara, Willie Malone.
FRONT ROW: Dan Gavin, Tommie Heavey, J. Duffy, J. McDonagh, Comdt. Paddy Kelly, J. Moran, Jimmie Flaherty, Bartley Cryan, M. Staunton.
IN FRONT: Dr. J. A. Madden, Medical Officer.
INSET (left to right) — *Top: Comdt. Paddy Duffy, Joe Baker; Bottom: M. Gallagher, Tom Ainsworth.*

Picture (copyright) by J. J. Leonard & Sons, Bofeenaun, Ballina

Joe Ring, Batt. Comdt., I.R.A.; Brigadier-General, National Army; Assistant Commissioner, An Garda Síochána. Photograph taken shortly before his death in action during the Civil War.

This regulation should be strictly enforced everywhere. Furthermore, officers should see to it that men are not allowed to go about with weapons in their pockets unnecessarily, a practice at the best childish and foolish, and at the worst highly dangerous. Some Volunteers seem to imagine that because they have done brave deeds during the War of Independence they are privileged people and entitled to behave in a way that would not be tolerated on the part of an ordinary civilian. They must be made to realize that this is not the case. Discipline must be rigidly enforced without respect to persons. It is only by this means that we can keep our army up to that high standard of morale and efficiency which we are all so proud of, and be prepared for a renewal of hostilities if and when such necessity arises.

The Volunteer Authorities now took advantage of the Truce to establish training camps for men. Such a one was started in the Workhouse in Westport, from which the inmates had been removed to the County Home in Castlebar. The decision to start these camps was not a wise one. They seemed to induce in the men a sort of barrack-square mentality which would be of little use in the only sort of war which a nation in our position could be expected to wage. The men who had borne the brunt of the fighting up to that time had had little formal training except the ability to shoot straight and keep a clear head.

I spent some time in the camp learning Morse signalling, by which we hoped to transmit messages by flags or flash-lamps. Despite the best efforts of the Camp O/C, discipline was lax. No sooner had the sound of his footsteps receded down the corridor after final inspection than pillow fights started. Impromptu concerts which lasted into the small hours of the morning were arranged; the roof that had sheltered the hungry people in the Famine days re-echoed to the strains of "The Old Rustic Bridge by the Mill" and "Kelly, the Boy from Killanne". The camp was a happy hunting ground for practical jokers. I arrived at the en-

trance one day to find the sentry holding at bayonet-point a formidable-looking individual who was demanding in a truculent voice to see the O/C of the guard. The sentry seemed to be in a quandary. The newcomer, who had his overcoat collar turned up, might be an agent from the Auxiliaries, who had a large force in the town. The sentry could not leave his post to search for an officer whom he might not recognise. A little group had gathered around the sentry, when the situation was saved by the arrival of "Butch" Lambert, who, recognizing the intruder as a member of Aughagower Company, turned to the man with the rifle and said, "You know the duty of a sentry: shout 'Halt' three times, and then shoot!" While the sentry was considering the morality of this peremptory order, the "emissary" had vanished.

On another occasion John Berry of Lanmore, who had come back from England to join the Column, declared in an audible whisper, after he had looked out the window at midnight, "The camp is surrounded by Auxiliaries; what's the idea?" Would-be Freedom Fighters rubbed their eyes, and began to think, as they conjured up visions of torture chambers, "Is this the end?" However, when Berry, with amazing *sang-froid* in the face of such danger, settled down to an untroubled sleep, the boys whispered to one another hopefully that perhaps he was only "seeing things".

Each Company from the country areas was brought in for a week's training. They were expected to bring their own rations. A crisis developed on one occasion, when a dinner of bacon and cabbage prepared for a section of Killawalla Company was mistakenly eaten by the signallers. I must confess that I was one of the men who took part in this dubious venture. There were threats that we would be reported to our superior officers for this serious breach of discipline, especially when a member of our section held up a piece of meat on his fork, and began a discourse on the culinary traits of Killawalla bacon. The matter was,

however, settled amicably, without recourse to the Top Brass.

The training of the Volunteers was carried out by Jimmie Flaherty, the ex-Connaught Ranger. It was an exercise in psychology to hear Jimmie, who was the kindliest of men in civil life, threaten dire vengeance on the unfortunate country boy who found it a physical impossibility to slope arms in three distinct movements.

The Republican, or Sinn Féin, courts, as the people usually called them, now functioned openly, sitting in the Town Hall, the justices being chosen from the officers of the clubs. The period had an air of unreality about it. It was disconcerting to find that one's next-door neighbour had become a District Justice overnight. The situation created a "Lawyer's Dilemma", as the Dáil, with nearly half its members in prison or "on the run", had no opportunity to pass legislation of a general nature. The lawyers, therefore, who could not now practice in the British courts, would be deprived of their means of livelihood. It was agreed however by the Irish Authorities that, in the interest of public order, points hitherto held good in law would be recognized by the courts. Thus we had the paradox of Irish Republican courts administering British law. The story was going the rounds of the village wag who, on being fined five shillings by an elderly neighbour, whom he had always teased and bullied, shouted from the dock: "Come down out of that, before I go up and pull the red whisker off you". He was promptly fined another five shillings for Contempt of Court.

The summer months of 1921 dragged on without any event of great importance taking place. In "B" Coy. area, normal police duties were carried out by four men under James Kearns. The local Volunteers continued to drill and receive instructions regularly, returning to their homes every night. One day early in December of the same year, as the Signals section was on its way to a meeting in the Workhouse, which had a permanent garrison, we met Vol. Josie O'Toole, who had been a very active member of his

Company since the struggle began. He told us that Peace had been signed the previous day, but he did not have any details. The *Irish Independent* of the following day proved that he had been correct. It contained particulars of the Treaty, which Arthur Griffith, leader of the Irish Delegation, described as "The substance of Freedom". We were sorely disappointed when we read the oath that was to be taken by the new Irish Parliament. It was in the following form: I . . . do solemnly swear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of the Irish Free State as by law established, and that I will be faithful to H.M. King George V, his heirs and successors by law, in virtue of the common citizenship of Ireland with Great Britain and her adherence to and membership of the group of nations forming the British Commonwealth of Nations.

This oath was in direct conflict with the one we had taken when we joined the Volunteers. At the start of the Peace talks, a cartoon appeared in an English newspaper. It had a huge hatchet marked, "Anglo-Irish troubles," with a grave at each end. One grave was marked "Home Rule", the other "Independence". Mr. de Valera was pointing to one grave, Mr. Lloyd George to the other. The picture had the Stage Irish caption:

> Sure and what's it that's causing the worry? Faith a thing that you'd hardly belave.
> For the hatchet they both want to bury, but they cannot agree on the grave.

Half a century later (1976) the ugly axe-head of the Anglo-Irish quarrel still takes its toll of lives. On November 4, 1921, *An tÓglach* contained the following leading article dealing with the situation.

THE CRISIS

At the time of going to press the issue of peace or war for Ireland hangs in the balance. By the time this issue appears it is possible that events will have occurred which

involve the resumption of hostilities. In cases where any doubt exists the council of prudence is always to be on the safe side, and in cases such as the present it is wise and necessary for all Volunteers to be prepared for the worse of two alternatives and to act on the assumption of the probable imminence of a fresh Enemy attack. The position of the Government of the Irish Republic has been made absolutely clear and it has the hearty support of the whole Irish people; and the Army of the Republic stands loyally and resolutely to its duty of serving the Government and people of Ireland. The rights and liberties of the Irish people, which the Volunteers were formed to defend, can never be bartered away, and the Government of the Irish Republic will never betray the interests which the people appointed them to promote. We have already warned Volunteers not to be misled by newspaper gossip. Not only the English but the Irish newspapers at the present time teem with misrepresentations of the National position, of the views of our trusted leaders, and the progress of negotiations. The Irish daily press has done a great deal of mischief by its eternal whine of "peace" and "settlements" and its suggestion that a "Settlement" was a simple, easy thing that could be arrived at as a result of talks between Ireland and England. These press statements are being quoted as representing Irish opinion, and they are being interpreted as showing that the Irish people wish for "peace at any price", and are prepared to make their claim to be a Sovereign State a matter of bartering and modification as the price of peace.

That is a lie. We stand for an honourable peace, but if our right to free existence as a nation is assailed by the armed might of another nation, we are as ready to fight as before we entered negotiations. Every Volunteer must hold himself ready to be called upon again on active service at any moment, and be prepared to do his utmost in the fight for freedom.

This historic statement, contained in a single paragraph, was the last gesture of a united people. One month later,

on December 6, 1921, the Treaty, or Articles of Agreement as it was called, was signed in London. Britain had succeeded in establishing in Ireland two governments, each bearing allegiance to the Crown, but in most other aspects alien to one another. Partition had become a fact of Irish political life. The civil strife that followed those events rates among the greatest tragedies of Ireland's history. The personality and mental attitudes of the leaders of the time had a profound effect on the course of events. Writing in the *Philadelphia Record* in the 1930s, Lord Birkenhead, one of the British signatories to the Treaty, stresses the differences, as he saw them, between Collins and Griffith. Collins, he noted, walked with a swaggering gait, seemed to belong to the open spaces, and would be best suited to the atmosphere of some frontier town. Griffith, who hated violence, was no "Bushwhacker", but seemed worn out by too much burning of the midnight oil. Their only similarity was their intense love for Ireland.

Meanwhile the leaders of the Volunteers began to take sides as the issues appeared to each personally. For Liam Mellowes, there was only, "The straight road without deviation". Richard Mulcahy saw the Treaty as the only firm ground to stand on. Seán McKeon supported the Treaty, saying that he was an extremist because he had an extreme love for Ireland. With the Irish genius for make-believe, the supporters of the Treaty insisted that they were the real Republicans, and that the Free State was a virtual Republic, while its opponents claimed that the Republic proclaimed in 1916 still existed. The result was bewilderment among the ordinary people and the rank and file of the Volunteers. Ambivalence and vacillation tortured the minds of the serious men. It was not a rare experience to find a man condemning the Treaty one day, and meet him a few weeks later resplendent in a Free State officer's uniform. In assessing the causes of the Civil War, most historians seem to have missed two points:

Firstly, most of the people who voted for a Republic in 1918 did not realise that they would have to fight for it.

There was no talk of guerilla warfare in the Sinn Féin manifesto. Men like Arthur Griffith had no intention of using violence to attain their ends. Many believed that Irish freedom might be obtained through the influence of President Wilson at the Peace Conference.

Secondly, some of the I.R.A. chiefs, having regard to the issues involved, seem to have thought that the Irish delegates, especially Collins, had no intention of signing anything, and that prolonging the Talks was a ruse to give the Volunteers a chance to re-organise. Mary McSwiney stated that leaders in the south had expressed to her the hope that the delegates would "keep them talking" until they were better prepared to resume the fight.

The attitude of the pro-Treaty leaders to their opponents may be summed up in this piece of hyperbole in a small propaganda newspaper in 1922.

If you find a fellow walking on your body, while another bloke
  starts wading through your blood,
Don't attempt to ring the night-bell for your toddy, or your
  attitude may be misunderstood.
If you dare to stir they'll brand you as a traitor, just as vile as
  Michael Collins or McKeon, and they'll curse you for a
  filthy foul Free Stater
False to Mitchel, Davis, Emmet and Wolfe Tone.
  Keep as quiet as quiet can be and do not heed 'em,
  try and scale down to take your final sleep, for the "boys"
  are marching on the way to Freedom
Where the road is always slippery and steep.

All the leaders were genuine lovers of Ireland, and most of them had risked their lives for her many times. It was Ireland's loss that they should quarrel so bitterly. The majority of the people in the Twenty-Six Counties were satisfied to accept the Treaty as an alternative to the "Immediate and terrible war" which they believed Britain would wage on them if they rejected it. Those in the six north eastern counties had no say in the matter. A popular saying repeated at the time was, "What's good enough for Michael Collins is good enough for me."

Most of the fighting men, however, thought differently. They were prepared to renew the fight, regardless of the consequences. In many areas the Volunteers followed the example of their senior officers. Recruiting for the Civic Guards, as the new Free State police was called, began. A Volunteer Coy. Captain could hope to get the rank of Sergeant immediately upon joining the Force. Many companies began to disintegrate.

On March 26, 1922, the senior officers at General Head Quarters who opposed the Treaty formed an Executive Council to govern the Volunteers.

This Council repudiated the authority of Dáil Éireann, which had ratified the Treaty, 64 deputies voting for and 57 against. On April 13 of the same year a unit of the Republican Volunteers occupied the Four Courts in Dublin City. Rory O'Connor and Liam Mellows were the leaders of this force. The Volunteers who had taken over Beggar's Bush from the British forces remained faithful to Dáil Éireann. The two opposing sections of the Volunteers were described in the press of the time as Dáil Forces (later the National Army) and Executive Forces (the Irregulars). To the ordinary people they were "The Free Staters" and "The Republicans". The question has been asked why the Republicans, with so many armed men supporting them, did not attack the force in Beggar's Bush, which formed the nucleus of the Free State Army. The answer seems to be that the Republicans were hesitant to start a civil war, as some of the Free State leaders such as Collins, Seán McKeon of Ballinalee, Seán Hales and others were held in very high esteem, and they did not wish to alienate too many people, as no guerilla warfare can be waged with any hope of success without active support from most of the civilian population. Soon after the Treaty was signed, a small newspaper was published. It was called *The Republic of Ireland*. The Editor was Erskine Childers, who had held high rank in the British Army, but had later joined the Irish movement for freedom. The paper had a silhouette of Cave Hill and extracts from Pearse's writing

"Ghosts". One was, "That God spoke to Ireland through Tone, ... That Tone's testimony as to this country is true and great, and that no other testimony has any truth or worthiness at all, is a thing upon which I stake all my mortal and all my immortal hopes". It was a futile effort to revive an emotion that had been bludgeoned out of most of the people by years of terror.

The intensity of the hatred engendered by the quarrel was amazing. Jealousy, the most active of human emotions, no doubt played a part. English historians were in a position to state, "The Irish temperament was seen at its worst in 1922". *Punch* magazine could joke about the Irish painting the letter boxes green, and everything else red. Perhaps Daniel O'Connell had such a situation in mind when he stated that nothing under Heaven was worth the shedding of human blood.

In the early summer of 1922, the pro-Treaty party announced that they would hold a meeting in Castlebar, at which Michael Collins would speak. The Republican forces under Comdt. Kilroy occupied the Military barracks at the time. When Collins began to speak, he was heckled by a section of the crowd, and a man speaking from a motorcar asked him a list of questions.

At some stage of the proceedings it is alleged that a member of Collins' party from Sligo drew a revolver. The platform was rushed immediately and an attempt made to seize him. It seems that he passed the weapon to another man and got off the platform. Press reports of the time state that a man was seen rushing through the crowd, pursued by several men in uniform. He was eventually captured and taken to the Military Barracks. He was later charged with firing two shots at Capt. W. Malone, Westport. During the commotion a man jumped into the driving seat of the lorry that was being used as a platform, and drove the vehicle out of the crowd. It seems that, through an oversight, the key had been left in the ignition. Comdt. Kilroy then ordered the people to disperse in the interests of peace.

On the Sunday following the Republicans held a rally at which Mr. De Valera was to speak. He did not arrive, however, but the meeting was held, at which Mary Mc Swiney spoke for nearly an hour and a half. She contended that acceptance of the Treaty would provoke a war of brothers in which the victors would find no glory any more than the vanquished. There were other speakers also, some of whom were in Volunteer uniform, and had revolvers in the holsters of their Sam Brown belts. Miss McSwiney made a good case against the Treaty, stressing Britain's right to reoccupation, the Oath of Allegiance to the King and other points. I do not remember Partition being mentioned. Dr. Madden, who had sacrificed his medical career to serve his country, said he would fight against the Treaty, regardless of the people he found opposed to him. Miss McSwiney offered to answer any question put to her, but this offer was not taken up. There was no great enthusiasm evoked by the speeches. One got the feeling that most of the people had made up their minds already to vote for the Treaty. They seemed to have a longing for peace and stability upon which no rhetoric had any effect.

There was also a meeting held in Westport, of which Mr. Patrick Duffy was Chairman. The Countess Markievicz was the principal speaker. She emphasised the fact that men had gone out on the hillsides badly clothed and badly armed to establish a Republic. Her appeal fell on deaf ears. Many people believed that if the Treaty was rejected, everything they held dear in regard to Ireland was lost. Joe Ring, who had been Batt. Comdt. in Westport, was arrested by the Republicans and kept in Castlebar barracks for some time when he took the pro-Treaty side and began to recruit men for the Civic Guards. In a letter to the press, he stated that he had taken an oath of allegiance to Dáil Éireann, and for any acts he had done or might do in the future, he was responsible to that Government only.

V

The Civil War

ON JUNE 27, 1922, news reached us that the worst had happened. On that morning the Free State Army, with an eighteen-pounder gun lent to them by the British, began to shell the Republican garrison in the Four Courts, when an ultimatum to release a Free State officer held prisoner there was ignored. There could be only one outcome of the struggle. Faced by an army with practically unlimited supplies of men and war materiel, abandoned by a war-weary people, denounced as rebels against lawfully-constituted government, the Republicans fought on, with no prospect but the certainty of ultimate defeat. The Free State Army was now being organized all over the Twenty-Six Counties. There was no shortage of recruits. Men who had served in the British Army were welcomed because of their knowledge of arms and military matters in general. When a large body of troops landed by boat at Westport Quay, the poorly armed garrison of Republicans in the town was taken by surprise. They fled to the mountains after defusing a mine they had laid in the street. Capt. Kearns and John Judge were among them. A few days afterwards the machine gun captured in Carrowkennedy was sent to Owenwee for safe keeping. With it were nine drums of .303 ammunition.

A week later I was awakened one morning by the barking of the dog. On the "street", as we always called the farmyard, I saw a unit of soldiers led by an officer with the insignia of high rank on his tunic. I recognized him as Joe Ring, our former Batt. Comdt. I knew that the troops had come from the back of the house, and thought about the machine gun. The troops moved to the gable of the

house out of my sight, and I was expecting a knock on the door, but none came. They did not raid the house, but went on their way towards Croagh Patrick. I looked for the tracks of the soldiers later, and found that they had passed within a dozen yards of the place where the gun was hidden.

It was the last time I saw Joe Ring alive. He was killed near Ballina on September 14, 1922. As members of the Young Men's Sodality, organized by Rev. Father Gibbons, we attended his funeral to Aughavale Cemetery. Gen. Seán McKeon and Gen. Lalor were in charge of the troops rendering military honours. A large body of Civic Guards also attended. He was their first Assistant Commissioner.

The Free Staters now occupied the Workhouse, the Police Barracks and the Town Hall. A number of huge tree trunks with many coils of barbed wire were placed on the Octagon. They used the head of George Glendenning on the monument for target practice, and eventually decapitated him. The Republicans on a few occasions fired on the garrison, but made no attempt to re-occupy the town. On one occasion Michael J. McDermott, a Louisburgh boy who lived with relatives, and myself had just yoked the horse to the side-car prior to leaving town when a heavy outburst of firing began.

We were in an exposed position at the top of Church Lane and the horse became restive, so we were unable to take cover at first. We could see groups of soldiers moving up Peter Street, which is opposite a part of the Demesne, from which we believed the Republicans were firing. We feared being caught in cross fire; however, a man who had served in the British Army came to our assistance in unyoking the horse from the car, and we were in a position to take cover until the firing, which lasted about half an hour, stopped.

An object of curiosity at the time was an armoured car which was parked near the Town Hall. It was made by placing a large boiler on the body of a lorry, and having loop holes bored in it. The Republicans had used it in the

capture of Clifden, and had the name "Queen of the West" painted on it. It was later captured by the Free Staters, who re-christened it "The Girl I Left Behind Me".

The Civil War of 1922 has been rightly called "The Unspeakable War". No lover of Ireland can take any pleasure in recording the events that took place at that time. However, with the passage of time, most of the enmities have died, and surviving participants can, like the people in Fr. Abraham Ryan's poem of the American Civil War, "Forget that hearts with dreams of hate and unforgiveness e'er were rife". Joseph Ruddy, O.C. of the Free State forces in Westport, as well as Joe Walsh, who had been a member of the pre-Truce Flying Column, were killed in a fight in Newport area.

With the capture of Comdt. Kilroy of the Republicans, most of the fighting in West Mayo came to an end. Towards the end of 1923, the Republicans issued a "Cease fire" order to their forces, who some time after could return to their homes without fear of arrest. Many of them, with no prospect of employment at home, sailed for Britain or America. Tim Healy was appointed Governor General of the new state. A popular verse of a song at the time was:

> The colleens of Erin are sailing away,
> And with them are sailing the Old I.R.A.;
> While Tim sits as gay as a cock on a gate,
> Representing King George in the Irish Free State.

After working for some time with the Land Commission, I decided to see more of the world. Towards the end of June, 1926, I bought a ticket for England. I could hardly have chosen a worse time. The greatest Coal Strike in Britain's history was just a week old. There had been a general strike the week before, but all except the miners had gone back to work. The price of my ticket from Westport to Lime St. Station, Liverpool, was one pound, nineteen shillings and five pence. The weather was lovely, and watching the sunset on the sea about half way to Holyhead was something never to be forgotten. The passage is often a

rough one, but that night one could hold a lighted match on the deck.

At Chester I parted with two men who had accompanied me from home and for the first time I was alone in a strange land. It was the year "Tipperary Tim" won the Grand National, and there was much talk among the train passengers about the race. My first reaction was one of astonishment at the genuine kindliness of most of the English people with whom I came in contact. As farm work was the only employment available, I went to Southport, took the train to Bescar Lane Station, and began to inquire for Wam's Farm, where Michael Walsh, a friend of mine, was working. I was advised by a farmer who lived near the station to ask for Dick Thompson's, as many people might not be familiar with the rather odd name of the farm. The area where Mr. Thompson lived was locally known as the "Mower", which I believe means the Moor. It is a large stretch of moory land between Southport and Ormskirk, which must be the flattest area in Europe outside of Holland. Without the aid of a large pumping station near Southport, no crops could be grown there because of flooding, as there is no fall for the water. This would be a pity, as the land is fertile. It is not owned by the farmers, as in Ireland, but is the property of the Trustees of Southport, from whom the farmers rent it out.

On the Monday after arriving. Michael O'Toole of Falduff, who worked at the White House farm, managed by Mr. Thompson's mother, kindly lent me his bicycle to go in search of work. It was an entirely new experience for me. Before starting off, I drew a sketch marking the most likely places I might find it. I had never seen a tarred road before, and with level ground as far as the eye could see, it seemed almost as if the bicycle was going on its own power. My efforts to find work seemed to be fruitless. The answer was always the same, "We have enough help at present". At one house where I called, a woman, no doubt seeing the anxiety on my face. said, "Don't lose hope, if you persevere, you'll find work". These words of encouragement from a complete stranger made me feel happier.

Finally I came to a farmhouse which had a name-plate on the door reading, "John Harrison, Farmer and Butcher, Halsall". In the yard was a man whom I recognised as Mr. Harrison, from descriptions I had been given by a man who had worked there the previous year. On asking him for work, he replied, "Yes, you can have a few days or a week". It was a very small beginning indeed, but I was to spend several weeks there, and the money I earned tided me on to more steady employment. Twelve other Irishmen worked there at the time. We got along very well with our English work-mates, but the sleeping accommodation there, as in most of the farms in the area, was appalling.

The Irish workers slept in outhouses, most of which were entirely devoid of bed-clothes of any sort. The men slept on straw, with potato sacks to keep them warm. This was not entirely the fault of the English farmers, as large groups of migratory labourers were taken on for a few months, and it would be virtually impossible to furnish decent facilities for such large numbers.

I used to spend Saturday night and Sunday in Southport with friends, where I could enjoy, with thousands of holiday makers, a stroll along the Promenade and Pleasure Ground. One evening on my way to the station I met the boss, who asked casually, "Where are you off to?" "Southport," I replied, and went on my way. On the following Monday morning, as we were on our way to the fields, I thought I could sense something unusual in the general conversation. One of the English workers said to me, "That was a rough job on Saturday night". "What was the job?" I asked. He looked at his companion and remarked, "He pretends not to know about it". Turning to me, he asked if I had been questioned by the Bobbies. He then informed me that the safe in Mr. Harrison's butcher shop had been stolen on Saturday night. It had been prised open with an iron bar. and dumped into the canal, but the thieves found no money. It contained some papers only, which were of no

use to them, and some of them floating on the canal had led to its discovery. Everybody working on the farm, except myself, had been questioned by the police. Two Irishmen who worked at Ainley's farm on the other side of the road were among other persons questioned. They declared that they had never been on Mr. Harrison's premises. The police picked up a pin which was used for placing the price on meat in Harrison's, which they could not account for; they were charged with the theft, and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. I was told later that one of them who appealed his case was acquitted.

Harvest time had now come, and many farm hands were needed. When I asked an Irishman, who was well "under the weather" in the Swan beer-house, if he knew of any place I might get a short spell of work, he replied that he knew of such a place, but could not recall the name, but thought it was something like Bond. I had heard somewhere about the association of ideas and, remembering that there was a brand of tea called "Brooke Bond", I asked him if it would be Brook. "That was it," he replied. "The name was Brooks!" I worked for a short time at this place. I have often wondered how old Brooks made a living. He had a small pump-house, but after heavy rain he had to use a boat to get to it.

I was now able to get work with my friend, Michael Walsh, who has since passed away, at Dick Thompson's. Dick spoke the Lancashire dialect, which at times I found very difficult to understand. His attitude towards Royalty puzzled me, as I thought all English people supported the Crown. His approach to the matter was logical. Referring to the King, he thought that they should "clod him aht". He didn't believe in paying folk for doing "nowt". The *Liverpool Weekly Post* carried an article in the dialect every week, and he took great pleasure in hearing me read it out for him. A study of it should prove interesting for someone with a flair for languages. The Biblical *thee* and *thou* are freely used, birds become "brids" and, instead of saying *she* when referring to a female, they say "who"

without sounding the *w*. The expression, "Tha noes," which they seem to use very often, means "You know".

We went into Southport every Saturday night. A Catholic church, where we often went to Confession, was on Seabank Road. You could not see the priest, but his name was printed on the Confessional. I can still vividly recall an old English priest named Fr. Woodcock. It was a great spiritual experience to have him hear your confession. A Parochial Hall at which we used to attend dances was close at hand. Scarisbrick Church was about two miles from where we worked, and it was there that we attended Mass on Sundays. The Irish usually occupied one side of the church, and the English the other. It was not meant, of course, as a form of segregation, but the Irish boys would naturally go into the seats where they saw their companions. I thought the Harvest Festival a very nice custom, when the church was decorated with sheaves of wheat, oats, apples and all the fruits of the harvest. Sephton's Grocery Store near Biscar Lane Station supplied all our requirements not produced on the farm where we worked. I was rather surprised to learn that migratory workers could get groceries "on time" if necessary, when they told the shopkeeper where they worked. I asked him if he had ever been cheated, seeing the opportunity the Irishmen had of absconding without paying their bills. "Only once," he replied, adding that he thought that was a pretty good record.

The Irish used to work very hard at what they called "Pratie Time". It was mostly piecework, the pay being two and a half old pence for every twenty yards dug, picked, and loaded on the wagon. A good worker could make up to £5 a week, if the crop was free from weeds and grass. That amount of money had considerable value at the time. Mild beer was five old pence a pint; mixed and bitter was a few pence dearer. A small whiskey was six pence and a bottle of Guinness stout seven and a half pence. On my way home from Sephton's store one day, I had an experience which I believe might have had serious con-

sequences. Bescar Lane Station had a level crossing, with a signal-man to open and close the gates as occasion demanded. When we got familiar with the signals, we often crossed by a small wicket gate, after the main gates had been closed, holding our bicycles over our heads. If the signal was down for an express train, we never took this chance, but waited until the signal-man had opened the gates. On this particular day I heard the rattle of the gates being closed against me as I came close to the lines. There was a girl of about twelve years, whom I recognised as the daughter of Fred Bibby, who lived close to the station, just in front of me; glancing at the signal, I saw, with some apprehension, that the signal was down for a "through" express train to Southport. The girl was inside the gates, with the front wheel of her bicycle close to the rails. She looked up at the signal-man, who apparently had not seen her, and was busy with his levers. Then she turned and looked at me, and I could sense the unspoken question on her lips: "What shall I do?" Speaking as calmly as possible, I said, "Place your bicycle in line with the rails, and move backwards towards the gates and me." She obeyed promptly. Minutes later, the train thundered on its way to Southport amid a swirl of papers.

Moore's, the Potato Merchants, had a clerk working for them in a little office near the station. He was of Irish descent, and seems to have had a love for Ireland that amounted almost to an obsession. He often travelled on the train to Southport with us, and would recite the epic of "Michael Dwyer" on the way. I do not know if he had ever been to Ireland. Passengers who travelled with us never made any comment, so we could not know their reaction to the idea of a man who was obviously English reciting Irish rebel poems on a train in England.

On Whit Monday we went to see the great Catholic procession, in which some twenty thousand people take part. It must be one of the greatest religious pageants in the world. Most of the saints are represented by people dressed up for the part. The most imposing figure I remember is

that of St. Joan of Arc on her white horse, and escorted by knights in armour. We were told that because of the loyalty of the people to their Church, Cromwell was unable to capture the town, and that it got the title of "Proud Preston" on that account.

Most of the farm-labourers who worked in Southport area came home to Ireland in November. A few, who had permanent jobs as horse-men, waited there for the winter. A longing for home seemed to come to us as Christmas approached. We used to amuse our English work-mates when we said, "I'm going back to the land of rest". They admired our zeal for attending Mass on Sunday, but couldn't understand why we should always pass the Methodist Church, which was more convenient. When I explained to old Chris Sutton, who worked with me, that we did not pray in non-Catholic churches, he reminded me that Christ had said, "Wherever there are a few gathered in My Name, I am amongst them". I have often thought of his words later on. He was sixty years ahead of his time.

We did not have as quiet a passage on our journey home as we had on the outwards one. The crossing can be quite rough at times, with huge waves sweeping across the deck, and suitcases sliding from one side to the other with the lurching of the ship. I admired the tenacity of the sailors in their sou'-westers as they went about their hazardous tasks. The seasonal migration of Irish farm labourers to England seems to have come to an end, as most of the work is now done by machinery, but at that time, although the potato digger was used by some farmers, they told us that they preferred the old-fashioned method, and found it was just as cheap.

I spent a good deal of the succeeding two years in England, always working at the same farm; Mr. Thompson would write to me in spring as soon as work was available; this saved me the trouble of looking for work, and I could relax and enjoy the trip. Of course I always kept in touch with my parents in Ireland by letters. In 1927, when Col. James Fitzmaurice and two German fliers, Capt. Kohl and

Baron Von Huenefeld, made the first East-to-West flight by aeroplane, we were proud that an Irishman had made flying history. One English paper had a photograph of Fitzmaurice with his daughter on his knee, and an article entitled, "How we conquered the Atlantic". It was customary in England at that time to cheer very important persons when they appeared on the newsreel in the cinema. Those cheers were usually reserved for the King or some royal persons. When a picture of Fitzmaurice and his two companions arriving in Berlin was shown, a small group of Irishmen began to cheer: they were quickly followed by others.

The following year I had the ill-luck to develop septic poisoning after a dental extraction, and had to spend over a month in Ormskirk Hospital. The Matron, doctors and nurses there were the essence of kindness: I believe the treatment I received there saved my life, as I was running a very high temperature. The ward I occupied had a small library, where I found a copy of *All the Year Round*, a periodical edited by Charles Dickens. I also found a novel by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle which I had not read before. It was called *The Green Flag* and had a green flag with a harp on the cover. The story was about an Irish Regiment in the British Army, which had mutinied, and refused to charge the enemy, somewhere in Africa, because the mothers of some of the men had been evicted in Ireland when they were too poor to pay the rent. However, a sergeant who had somehow come into the possession of a green flag with a golden harp on it waved the emblem in front of the men, and shouted something about fighting for Ireland: the Irish charged forward, and swept to victory.

VI

America

I SPENT the next two years at home, but I was still restless. Finally I decided to see what America was like, although a cartoon in the *Independent* pictured an emigrant with the word "Unemployment" printed on his suitcase. A passport was the first requirement for the journey. When I received the little booklet with the golden harp on the cover, the question, "What price freedom?" occurred to me as I read on the first page that, "We, James McNeill, esquire, Governor of the Irish Free State, request and require in the Name of His Britannic Majesty all whom it may concern to allow the bearer to pass freely, etc." After all our efforts to break "The rusty chain of bondage" I could not visit America without the King's permission!

I sailed on the German liner *Dresden*, which took on passengers at Cóbh on Easter Sunday, 1930. I enjoyed the voyage very much; the food was good, and quite a few of the Germans could speak English. I was puzzled by the different colouring on the eggs served, but found out that it was an old German custom to paint eggs different colours at Easter. A small bilingual paper was published on board, and I was surprised to find that the word "greenhorn" had the same meaning in German as in English. I had thought that the word applied to Irish new-comers only. It was amusing to hear the English-speaking Germans say that they could understand us clearly except when we spoke Irish. There were no Irish speakers on board; they were referring to the Kerry people, whose accent seemed to puzzle them. On board were two little girls in colourful attire who spoke neither German nor English. An old German told me he thought that they were Slovaks. I thought

there was something lonely about them in such foreign surroundings, and I have often wondered how they fared in the "Land of Opportunity". We played games with the other passengers and picked up some German phrases. They seemed to have trouble in pronouncing the letter G as we do, also the letter *W*, which was *V* to them. Otto Von Sternberg, who had been in the first World War, talked to me about what they could do "When Shermany comes to make var". They had known, of course, about our struggle for freedom, and Casement's attempt to land German arms in Ireland. Unlike the Irish passengers, most of them were artisans or tradesmen, a fact that would give them a better chance of employment than untrained persons.

In mid-Atlantic we met another German liner, the *Europa*, on her way to Germany. The great vessel, with her brilliant lights, surrounded by the billows of the ocean, was an imposing sight. It was night-time when we sighted New York Harbour. The Irish passengers gave a mighty cheer when they first caught a sight of the magnificent panorama of lights from beyond the Statue of Liberty on the left, and on to Manhatten, where the great sky-scrapers rose like gigantic poles above the water-front. We were met at New York by the Traveller's Aid Society, whose members gave every aid and assistance to new-comers. As I was going to Philadelphia, I had to get a ferry to Grand Central Station, where I could take a train to my destination.

In Philadelphia, I was lucky enough to get work in the equipment department of the American Telegraph & Telephone Company at the Bourse Building, 5th & Market Sts. It was a good company to work for, and there was a chance of promotion if one could procure the proper education. At that time, the Morse system was used on a large scale for sending messages. This has now been largely replaced by the Teletype Printer, which obviates the necessity of learning the Morse code. As I had been familiar with the code while in the Volunteers in Ireland, I took a course in Telegraphy at the Wanamaker Institute, and enrolled in

the Central Evening High School to learn the mathematics necessary for this department. I received every courtesy and encouragement from the Superintendent, Dr. Rorer, and his teaching staff.

The School published a small newspaper. I have a copy dated April 4, 1933. It may be of interest to readers of this book to quote the editorial, as it gives an insight into the climate of thought in America when John F. Kennedy was a boy.

QUESTION OF THE HOUR

"What do I get out of it? Has any one ever heard that question before? Does it ring familiarly? It is a great question in that it rings around the world and has caused universal sorrow and destruction. Of all Evils' numerous sly, devastating agents, that question is the most capable. Surely a man will have success if he lives and works for himself. That is a natural ambition. You were born and bred in an atmosphere of freedom and liberty. Today money is synonymous with freedom. It talks, they say. The attempt to live without it is ample proof that poverty is abject slavery. But precedent and common sense have taught us that only a small, small minority may attain to that desired end. There is only one man of wealth among a million poor. Does it not occur to your humanitarianism that it is worth infinitely more to strive for happiness and equal opportunity for all rather than to accede to an individualistic position of wealth, while about you creep starving fellow creatures? What do I get out of it? That question is the embodiment of selfishness, and selfishness diametrically opposed to universal welfare and progress.

I have quoted only part of the article. The sentiments expressed might apply to any country as much as to the United States.

It was in that year (1933) G. Bernard Shaw paid a visit to America. Speaking over the radio, he passed some rather uncomplimentary remarks about the American people. To

illustrate their reaction to this, I quote an article in the *Evening Star*:

HE'S HERE AT LEAST (*Sic*)

George B. Shaw has arrived in America at last. Still, we wonder why he chose to arrive in San Francisco when his latest production is being played in Philadelphia. Perhaps he was fearful of the ire he has aroused in Philadelphians who have viewed his latest play — or is it his maidenly modesty?. G.B. Shaw told a news-reel audience, "Ladies and gentlemen, of course you know this is all a fake. This is supposed to show me as I get into the plane, but it has all been prearranged". Of course it was prearranged, as is everything else George Bernard Shaw does. And the "great American public" doesn't have to be reminded of the fact. The great G.B. is a total abstainer, which isn't at all strange. How could anyone enjoy a glass of beer after a beard like Shaw's had sopped up the foam?

The next paragraph by the same writer is interesting: it was written seven years before Hitler started the second World War.

ADVICE TO A DICTATOR

Adolph Hitler, who by his own confession seeks vengeance on those who caused him his many trials and tribulations in his early days, has built his regime on hatred and revenge. Such a foundation cannot well withstand the weight of a successful dictatorship, which at best is an uncertain affair. Hitler would do well to forget petty grievances, and attempt to imbue in the hearts of his followers and the rest of the world a love and desire for his ideals and aims, rather than attempt by military rule to set up a government which will exclude anyone whom the mighty Hitler dislikes.

When Hitler was elected Chancellor of Germany, one of the Philadelphia papers had as a heading for its editorial, "Windbagism wins," and when a threat of war came from a more distant part of the world and the

Stars and Stripes was torn down in Japan, the *Philadelphia Record* had for its banner headline every day for a month, "We don't want war". Nobody could foresee that the "windbag" would burst some day, with such terrible consequences for the whole world.

As our company was the centre of the communication system, we were often the first to hear some sensational news. We had a machine that copied some of the news reports sent to the papers by teletype, to make sure that the lines were working properly. One night in March, 1932, one of the technicians said to me, "Lindbergh's baby has been kidnapped!" He pointed to a machine that was recording the latest news. Col. Charles A. Lindbergh had become a popular hero in America when on May 20-21, 1927, he flew alone from New York to Paris, a distance of 3,600 miles, in 33½ hours. The next day, and for many days afterwards, news-bulletins every quarter of an hour told of the activity of thousands of police and State Troopers scouring the Sourland Mountains in search of the baby or its kidnappers. A Dr. Condon — called "Jayfsey", a name coined from his initials — played a prominent part in delivering the ransom demanded, by throwing it over a grave-yard wall. Although the money was collected, the baby was not returned: seventy three days later its dead body was found by a Negro truck driver in a wood. It was two years later that the police got a clue as to who carried out this brutal crime. A man named Bruno Richard Hauptmann paid for petrol in New York with one of the ransom notes. A keen-eyed garage attendant recognised the secret mark on the bill. He took the number of the man's car, and three days afterwards he was arrested. 12,000 dollars of the ransom money was found in his house. As he was a German, the police got in touch with the authorities in his home town, and found that he had a criminal record. The Lindberghs, who were wealthy people, had two girls in their employment: one was Betty Gow, a Scottish children's nurse; the other was Violet Sharpe, an English maid. Violet Sharpe committed suicide, although she had not been

charged with any part in the crime; Betty Gow remained in the employment of the family.

At his trial in Flemington, N.J., in January, 1935, Hauptmann admitted writing the ransom notes, but denied that he was the murderer of the child, saying that the money had been left to him by a German, who had since gone back to his homeland and died there. He was sentenced to death, and died in the electric chair on April 3, 1936. I remember having heard people remark at the time, "I ain't worrying about any millionaire's baby," but the hearts of most people went out to the lonely parents who had lost their first-born; it reminded me of the lines in one of John Boyle O'Reilly's poems, "I have no envy, but pity, for the hardships the rich endure".

Mention of Lindbergh brings back to my mind another airman who tried to emulate him by flying the Atlantic alone. His name was Hausner, and he was of Polish descent. When there was no news of him after three or four days, the affair was quickly forgotten; several people had made the atempt, and were never heard of again. However, a week afterwards, the morning papers carried a photograph of a lonely pathetic figure kneeling in prayer before the altar in a small church. It was Hausner's wife, praying for the safe return of her husband. Many cynical remarks were passed as we scanned the paper for a few minutes before starting work. It was not that we were callous about the life of a fellowman, but to our sophisticated minds there seemed to be something absurd about the idea of praying for the safe return of a man whose chances of survival were about one in a thousand. "The sharks have that man" was the laconic comment of our foreman, as he sent us about our various tasks; but Hausner was not providing food for the sharks — ten days from the time he had made his attempt, he was found alive and well floating on the wreckage of his plane. The faith of the lonely figure in the photograph had prevailed.

In November, 1932, the Abbey Players made a tour of America. Although I was on night-work, I got to see two

of their plays in the Garrick Theatre, *The White-headed Boy* and *Juno and the Paycock*. Although I thought that the shady characters got rather too much of the limelight in the latter play, I enjoyed the superb acting of Barry FitzGerald, Eileen Crowe and all the cast, most of whom are with us no more. This extract from the American press of the time will give some idea of the reaction of playgoers in the United States.

THE IRISH GO GREEK

Noel Thornton, one of the play reviewers for the Associated Press, sends the following from New York: "Dublin's Abbey Theatre players, whose season of Irish plays has left the dramatic critics gasping for adjectives, sought new fields to conquer in a special performance this week. Dropping the rich accents of Dublin and its countryside, they appeared for a night as ancient Greeks in *Oedipus the King*. They presented a new version of the play — new to Broadway, that is — by William Butler Yeats, who spoke briefly before the performance, outlining the purposes of the new Irish Academy of Letters, for the benefit of which the performance was given. Yeats' version of the historic play is done in the simplest language, but he has imbued its major scenes with somewhat more emotionalism than is present in the classic translations. The New York audiences were sometimes conscious of Irish twists of phraseology and accent, but the performance of F.J. McCormack as Oedipus and Eileen Crowe as his queen were indeed skilful, and served to prove again the versatility of the Company.

In the meantime, America was experiencing the greatest economic depression in the history of the nation. Many firms were laying off workers, or lowering their wages at an alarming rate. When people asked you if you were working, and you replied, "Yes," they invariably commented, "You are lucky". Elderly people who found themselves out of work seemed to be the hardest hit. In many

cases the firms they had worked for all their lives went bankrupt. A large locomotive works building at 18th & Hamilton St. was taken over as a shelter for the homeless, and financed by charitable organizations. Yet motor-cars filled the streets and people seemed to be well dressed; one was often approached on the sidewalks with the request, "Buddy, could you spare a dime?" Whether they were genuine cases of hardship or not, one could never tell. In the summer of 1933, many slept in the parks with newspapers over them, and then joined a queue where they were given a sandwich. This was the bread-line, which had to be seen before one could believe that times had gotten so bad in a country that had given a living to millions of immigrants as well as its own people in days gone by.

In 1933 a presidential election took place. President Herbert Hoover addressed a meeting in Philadelphia; as he walked from Broad St. Station to City Hall, he was greeted by derisive cries by a small section of the crowd; it was the first time since the foundation of the United States that a president was treated with such disrespect. An aircraft flew overhead with the words "Watch the swing to Hoover" in large letters strung behind it, but there was no swing when election day came; Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected President. A campaign to end Prohibition, which seemed to have brought much crime and misery, was in progress at this time. Gangsters were making their riches on the manufacture and sale of "moonshine", as the illicit beer and whiskey were called. Houses where the stuff was sold were called "speak-easys", for obvious reasons. Philadelphia's most notorious gang leader was called Micky Duffy. He was not of Irish descent, his real name being Cusick, but assuming an Irish name gave him a sort of romance in the eyes of his followers; he met the same fate as most gangsters, being found murdered in bed.

When Roosevelt was elected, one of his first acts was to legalize the production of light beer, as a prelude to the repeal of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, which had brought about Prohibition thirteen years earlier. Not

everyone, however, was in favour of the re-introduction of alcohol. The following poem will give an idea of the reaction of some people.

BRINGIN' BACK THE BEER

By E. J. Cummings

(With apologies to Kipling's "Danny Dever")

"What are the bugles blowin' for?" said "Prohib" on parade.
"To fill you up, to soak you up," the Brewer-man said.
"What makes you look so glad, so glad?" said "Prohib" on parade.
"I'm bursting with the news," the Brewer-man said.
"For they're bringin' back the Lager, you can hear the grand march play.
The "anti-drys" are joyful, they're crazy for the day.
They've taken off the odium and cut his bones away.
An' they're bringin' back the beer in December."

"I know the blackness of 'is past," said "Prohib" on parade.
"It was a vicious one, 'tis true," the old observer said.
"I've seen 'is work a score of times," said "Prohib" on parade.
"Now they're makin' him a saint," the old observer said.
"They're bringin' back the lager, you must mark 'im in 'is place.
For 'e 'as ruined many a home, you must look 'm in the face.
To millions of his countrymen, he has brought disgrace.
For they're bringin' back the beer in December."

Of course I always took a keen interest in events in the Old Country. When Fianna Fáil came to power, one newspaper poster had a photograph of Mr. De Valera with the caption, "Heads Ireland, but swears allegiance to King". A cartoon in *Philadelphia Record* had a picture of John Bull being hit on the head with a brick marked "De Valera's election". Under the picture were the lines, "Sure a little bit of Heaven fell out of the sky one day". One edition of a morning paper held a report that a British minister, when asked his views on the witholding of the Land Annuities by the Irish said, "We will not be sending any black Indians or warships to Ireland, but we will certainly take action". We were puzzled by the reference

to Indians, but the next edition of the paper brought an explanation: it was a printer's error, and should have been "Black and Tans".

There was a protest in New York from the Irish societies about a cartoon in which the Free State and Northern Ireland were depicted as two pigs that De Valera was trying in vain to make eat out of one trough. The newspaper involved refused to apologize, pointing out that one of the major political parties in America did not take offence at being depicted as a mule. Some peculiar propaganda papers found their way into the office where we changed into our working clothes. One such paper was called the *Fellowship Forum.* I believe it was left there as a joke, to see what the reaction of the Irish workers would be. I saw only one copy. It described how De Valera, "With typical Roman Catholic disregard for his oath of allegiance to the King, which he took when he went into the Dáil," was now actively training the I.R.A. to make war on "Ulster" and drive the British out of Ireland. I am convinced that such false propaganda, fed to young people who believe it, is at the root of trouble in the six counties of Northern Ireland today.

The election of President Roosevelt, while it gave new hope, did not solve America's unemployment problem. A large body of war-veterans, who were now out of work, began a march on Washington, to demand payment of a bonus which was not due to them until 1944. They spent some time in Philadelphia, living in sheet-iron huts erected along the Schuylkill (pronounced *Scukil*) River. Some of the large firms supplied them with food. When they reached Washington, D.C., they camped on Government property, and had to be driven out by the military. The Government subsequently agreed to pay the bonus. A re-forestation corps was also started, the wages being one dollar per day, with board, lodging and medical attention. It was very low indeed by American standards, but many young people were glad to avail of the opportunity to get work of any sort. The National Recovery Act passed by

Roosevelt's Party made more money available for employment, and gradually the nation began to improve.

The most tragic result of the great depression was the bank failures. Thousands of people found that the savings of a life-time had disappeared in a single night. Many were not emotionally suited to stand such a shock, and lost their reason. Those who had been spend-thrifts all their lives were inclined to poke fun at their more frugal fellowmen. Some were thankful to have their health, and were ready to make a new start. The mental attitudes of the people concerned seemed to make a lot of difference.

Nobody had been laid off by our Company yet, but we had some sort of an awareness that we could not escape indefinitely. Then some men in the higher departments were let go. With the system of seniority which was the rule, the last persons taken on would be the first to be laid off. Notices saying that there would be no more lay-offs were posted up, but this was only an effort to keep the workers from getting uneasy. Then one night, Mike Walsh, who came from Straid, Castlebar, and had been a great friend of mine, myself and some other employees who had not been very long with the Company, were told by Mr. Buffington, the Superintendent, that he was sorry there was no more work for us until conditions improved, at which time we would be taken on again.

During my first year in the U.S., I paid a visit to New York to see my sister, who is in a convent in Peekskill. I went first to Staten Island, where another sister was on the nursing staff of one of the hospitals there. A ferry boat carried passengers from the mainland. The fare was a nickel (five cents) which you dropped in a slot that operated a turn-stile. An Italian band, which had a huge harp, entertained the passengers. I wondered if they could subsist on the money collected.

As I was a stranger to Staten Island, I asked a man who was sitting in a car if he could direct me to a number on Bard Avenue. "Sure," he replied, adding, "I'll drive you there, just because I like the way you speak." This he did

promptly, refusing to accept any reward. This act of kindness by a complete stranger in a foreign land impressed me very much.

That night an old lady who was paying a visit to the house where my sister stayed entertained us by reading the cards. When she had dealt the pack for me, she told me that I would be in an automobile accident. I am not superstitious but the thought occurred to me that I had not travelled by automobile since I arrived in America. I thought Staten Island a lovely place in which to live. Next morning I set out for Peekskill, which is beautifully situated overlooking a bend in the Hudson River. The good sisters treated me well. Sr. Magdalen, who was in charge, told me that she was very proud to say that Seán T. O'Kelly had served Mass there. Frank Aiken accompanied him on the visit. As I was on the point of leaving for New York, one of the sisters called out to the driver of a car which was just moving away and asked him if he would give me a lift to the city. He readily agreed, stopping and telling me to sit in. He seemed to have inherited the "gift of the gab". He told me that he was a cop, and that his name was Brennan. Did I ever hear of "Brennan on the Moor?" During the rest of the journey to New York, he kept up such a barrage of jokes about Ireland that I was bored almost to tears when I arrived there. Perhaps it was my sense of humour, or lack of it, that was at fault, but I breathed a sigh of relief when I parted with the obliging "Highwayman" at New York.

On the occasion of a visit to Worcester, Mass. (the natives always call it Wooster), I came in contact with a 'bus-driver who must have been the most courteous and patient man in America. A change of vehicles took place at Times Square, in the yard of the Dixie Hotel. He left his foot on the step of his 'bus, and began to give instructions to his passengers as to how they could get to any of the various places served by the Greyhound Bus Company. It was hardly necessary to ask any questions. He certainly had all the answers. I found the atmosphere in Worcester

somewhat more relaxed than in the bigger cities. The first policeman from whom I asked directions was Dominick McGreal of Louisburgh, who is still hale and hearty, on retirement for some years. I met him in Westport recently when he was home on a visit.

It takes the newcomer some time to get used to the American climate. The heat in summer causes a loss of sweat much greater than we experience over here. This contrasts with the extreme cold in winter.

I remember coming out from work and finding the snow three feet high on the sidewalks. I was hoping to get a trolley-car, but a man told me that one had just gone by, and the next one would be in half an hour; I decided to walk, and had gone only a few blocks when I saw the car I had missed pushed off the lines by the force of the snow gathered before it. However, when the snow-ploughs got to work, most of the city traffic was on the move by noon.

At the Telegraph School, I became acquainted with boys of many different backgrounds. One with whom I became very friendly was Jewish. His name was Morris Schwartz, and I thought him the most intelligent boy I had ever met. He gave me a good idea of the prejudice against the Jews in a land that is supposed to have no class-distinction. "You have no idea," he told me, "of the look they give me in some places when I ask for employment." We had a college-boy, Fred Krueger, of German descent, who told me that most Germans had the belief that they could beat the world in warfare. This belief, which Hitler took advantage of, was the cause of their ultimate downfall. Mr. Saddington, the teacher, held views about Ireland which, I found, were shared by many people not of Irish descent. He thought that the Irish Free State, which was mostly agricultural, wanted to "grab" the North, which was industrial; England, he believed, was the best friend the Irish had, but the Irish didn't know it.

Philadelphia has a large coloured population, but we had no racial trouble there in the 1930s. It was a new experience for me to walk up Montgomery Avenue and never see

a white face. It seems that any white people who lived there formerly had moved away. To see and hear young people usher in the New Year in American cities is an experience not to be forgotten. Armed with cheap bugles fashioned to make the maximum amount of noise, they blow them in the ears of every passer-by with a familiarity that would hardly be tolerated by strangers anywhere in Europe. It's all taken as fun, and nobody ever thinks of taking offence.

After being laid off, I spent most of the time, when not in search of work, in the Public Library, which has a section devoted to books relating to Ireland. One such book drew my attention. It was by Clifton Johnson, author and illustrator, of Hadley, Mass. The book was called *The Land of the Shamrock* and the author lost no opportunity of ridiculing the people, their religion and customs. A picture of a vehicle with the words, "Mail Car, Westport to Leenane," was on one of its pages. The author described the priest sprinkling holy water at the stations, and how an old man "kept up an awkward hopping movement, as if in ecstatic eagerness to feel some of the precious drops trickling over him". Describing stepping-stones in a river, he commented, "The stones, though they made what might be a fair crossing for a goat, or the bare-foot natives, were unstable for a Christian used to bridges". A photograph of a pig with an upset bucket had the caption, "Inspector of streets".

In the library I also found a *Life of Parnell* by Mr. St. John Ervine in which he lashed out at his countrymen. Ireland, which, he said, "was usually depicted as a gentle maiden, playing a harp, could become, on occasion, a clawing hag". He wrote of "Beasts that roam in the Celtic Twilight", and the capacity of the Gaelic people to turn and attack that which they formerly revered. Another book, which bore the writer's initials only, described the Black and Tans as gentlemen and the Irish Volunteers as murderers. Somebody had written in the margin that the former were convicted criminals who had been released from prison to serve in Ireland.

When all my efforts to find work proved fruitless, I booked a passage to Ireland in the spring of 1933. I was to sail from Pier 8, on the *Britannic*, but through being misdirected at New York I took the wrong ferry and found myself at Liberty St., about a mile from the Pier. When I asked the policeman on traffic duty there, he told me that I would have to take a taxi. "What part of Ireland are you going to?" he inquired. When I replied "Westport", he said, "Sure I'm from Castlebar, myself. How did you ever save enough money to take the trip? I wish I could be with you!" He beckoned to an Irish taximan, and as I entered the cab I could hear him shouting to the people waiting to cross the street, "Come on there, don't be asleep!" Remembering how I had been hustled when I first landed in the U.S., I found a secret pleasure in hearing a Castlebar boy telling Americans to wake up, in the capital of their own country!

VII

Back Home

THE JOURNEY HOME was enjoyable. There was no language barrier, and dances and concerts were arranged. We could guess by the formation of the clouds when we were nearing land. One morning, a dark object appeared away to the north. It showed only very faintly and disappeared again after some time. We were told that it was Croagh Patrick. The first sight of Galway was nothing but mountainside. It would disappear and come in sight again with the lurching of the liner. Then we caught sight of the tender that would bring us to Galway city. The trunks and other luggage had to be wheeled on hand-trucks into the Customs shed to be cleared by the officials. Workmen shouting "Gangway" as they wheeled their heavy trucks through the crowd seemed to create a lot of confusion. A lady who was standing near me remarked, "Look at that gang, they haven't got any system!" She had succumbed to the urge of many returned exiles who like to find fault with everything in Ireland, thereby creating an unnecessary mental barrier between themselves and those who had neither the necessity nor the inclination to live outside their native land. I answered, "I think they're doing alright". "You wouldn't say that," she countered, "if you had just arrived from New York."

She seemed taken aback when I told her that I had come across on the *Brittanic*. She may have been a first-class passenger, as I could not remember having seen her on the ship.

As it was too late to get a 'bus to Westport, I stayed in Galway that night. Everything seemed to me very quiet indeed: motor-cars were not very numerous at that time,

and the familiar rattle of the horse-drawn cart could still be heard. On the 'bus ride to Westport by Castlebar I realized why Ireland was called the Emerald Isle. The fields here are a much darker shade of green than the ones that I remembered between New York and Philadelphia.

* * *

Conditions had not improved in Ireland during my absence. The Economic War was on, and politics seemed to be the main topic of conversation. That summer a meeting was billed for Westport at which Gen. Eoin O'Duffy, leader of the Blue Shirts, was to speak. This organization had adopted the Fascist salute of groups of a similar class in Italy and Germany which had come to power by force of arms. The Blue Shirts denied that they had any such ambition, but said they were formed to protect anti-Government speakers, who were having a rough time in areas where feelings ran high.

A large body of men on horses decorated with blue ribbons assembled at the Octagon, where the meeting was to be held. There was also a big crowd of people holding different political opinions. There was some commotion when a medium-sized man in a blue shirt with shoulder straps, and wearing a black beret, came from the direction of the Railway Station, surrounded by a body-guard in similar attire, and quickly mounted the platform. I was close to the platform, so I could see clearly what was taking place. The man with the body-guard was Gen. Eoin O'Duffy, who had been first Commissioner of Police, but had been replaced by another man when Fianna Fáil came to power, and had refused to accept another position offered to him. A Civic Guard stepped up to him and seemed to be about to place a hand on his shoulder. O'Duffy pushed him aside with an impatient gesture, and said he would speak only to the Superintendent. That officer then approached him, and after some parley he went with him quietly towards the Police Barracks, where a unit of soldiers wearing gas

masks were waiting to help the police deal with any trouble that might arise.

The next speaker who attempted to address the meeting wearing a blue shirt was also arrested. A third man in a black beret stepped forward, and said that he had come from the county that was consecrated by the blood of Michael Collins, and that they would follow their leader anywhere, but I cannot remember any further arrests. Mr. FitzGerald-Kenny then addressed the people. I thought him one of the thinnest men I had ever seen, and I was rather surprised at the bitterness of his opening remarks. He had been a minister in the former Government. There were no further incidents during the meeting.

The two men arrested later sued the Government, claiming compensation for illegal arrest, as they insisted that they were taken into custody for a crime unknown to the law, namely, the wearing of a blue shirt; their case was successful, and they were given adequate compensation.

That was 1937. I wonder if Gen. O'Duffy had still the same admiration for the German leader a few years later?

VIII

Back to England

DURING THE NEXT TWO YEARS, conditions in America had not improved to any great extent, so when my re-entry permit expired I set out for England again. This time I went to Cheshire, and got the surprise of my life when a grocer refused to accept Irish money from me. Fortunately, I had a good friend with me, Joe Quinn from Knappagh, who gave me all the money I needed for the time being. I only spent a few weeks in Cheshire, when I went again to Southport, which seemed to draw me towards it like a magnet. I went in for a drink to the Railway Bar in Chapel St. A red-haired taximan, I remembered, always went in there for his lunch about noon-time. It was seven years since I had visited Southport, but the taximan was there drinking his pint, just as I had left him seven years ago. For a split second I pictured the ludicrous idea that it was the same pint he was drinking when last I had seen him, and that Time had stood still for seven years!

This time I worked for an Irishman, Austin O'Donnell, who had married the daughter of a Mr. Howard whom he worked for, and rented a farm near Churchtown. When haytime came, I decided to see what life was like in the Hay Country. I had intended to go to Blackburn, but when I met a man named John O'Connell from Knock, who was familiar with another district, I went with him. We got work near Mytholm Royd, Yorkshire. The town looked like a small forest of factory chimneys. It had a wide street, crowded with well-dressed and seemingly happy people, and I never heard the word "pollution" mentioned. We had a pleasant time working for Tom Bailey, who had served with the army overseas, and seen most of the holy places

in Palestine. A man with the rather unusual name of Makepeace, who owned the next farm to the Baileys', paid them a visit when we were there. Mrs. Bailey told me it was just a year since he had called before. I though it a great contrast to Ireland, where neighbours visited one another quite frequently.

After leaving the Hay Country we went to Bradford, where we got on Public Works. I found that it was much easier than the farm work that I had been used to. We stayed in a boarding house owned by a Mr. Burke, an Irishman who had been a sergeant in the British Army. When he expressed great admiration for Hitler, I asked him with some surprise what he admired about him, as from reading the papers I had no illusions as to his aims. Mr. Burke replied that he would keep the priests in their proper place.

From Bradford I moved to Leeds, where Michael Joyce, a friend from home, and myself got work on the Gipton Estate, which had been taken over to carry out a big housing scheme. It was easy to get work in Leeds. On the other hand, it must be one of the most unhealthy cities in the world. The density of the fog that envelops it at times is impossible to describe. During the black fog that I remember in 1937, visibility was no more than a yard. A man with a stick which he waved back and forth had to walk in front of the tram cars, and people were advised to carry a newspaper when on the streets; the electric light was cut off during the daytime to prevent wastage. These conditions lasted for two weeks.

There was another sort of fog darkening the horizon of the British Empire which few people were aware of. It was the Bishop of Bradford, with the appropriate name of Dr. Blunt, who gave the first inkling of the fact that the as yet uncrowned King Edward VIII had become the lover of Mrs. Wallis Simpson, a divorced woman with no royal blood. The news caused a sensation in England, where most people idolize the Royal Family. The British Press, it seems, had been aware of the situation for some time but

had witheld the news at the request of the Government. After something of a furore in Parliament, the news-boys were shouting, "The King abdicates!" as they sold their papers. It was rather amusing for the Irish to read, a few days later, the heading "Edward VII still King in Ireland". The Dáil had passed no act recognizing the Abdication, but we were hardly aware that His Majesty still held so important a place in our scheme of government.

Another memory of these years that comes to mind is the poster of *The Daily Worker*, a Communist paper: "Franco flung back from Madrid!" The Spanish Civil War was raging. On the building site where we worked, Michael Joyce and myself were, to a great extent, our own bosses. We had a light concrete-mixer which we were able to push from place to place, and Michael, who had worked in a garage, was familiar with the engine. We had an English work-mate whom we called Lincoln, though I do not believe that was his real name. He always carried a two-foot rule, but did hardly any work. As he had been in the army and travelled in foreign lands, I asked him if he had any exciting adventures. He replied quite frankly that he had spent most of his time in the "clink", for "pinching" things. Yet we found him a congenial work-mate, and didn't worry that he was going to rob us some day. When we talked of the Revolution in Spain, he used to say that England should have a "Resolution" too! Andy Anderson, our ganger, seldom paid us a visit on the job, but when the work was nearing its end we were among the last to get our cards. He was the nicest ganger I ever worked under.

We worked in Leeds until Christmas, and then decided to come home. The train to Liverpool was overcrowded, so we had to sit on our suit-cases in the corridor. A carpenter who accompanied us, and had settled down in England, advised us not to follow his example. He gave us some cogent reasons for this advice. It was the age-old problem of maladjustment to environment and species, rarely foreseen until it is too late to look for a remedy. Another passenger livened the journey by producing a bottle of rum,

and insisting that all within reach in the narrow corridor help themselves to it.

IX

The Second World War

It was good to be back in Ireland again, even though there was no pay envelope on Friday or Saturday night. The Economic War had been settled, and trade with Britain was going smoothly again. The new Government was giving generous grants to have new farm-houses built. Many people pulled down the old thatched houses and built new homes, with the aid of a grant and loan, which covered most of the cost of material and labour at the time. A new situation was, however, soon to arise. The second World War, which was now raging, brought about the rationing of most of the necessities of life. Scarcity of petrol meant that there were very few motorcars or lorries on the roads. Old side-cars and traps which had been regarded as out of date were put to use again. Bicycles became very popular, but tyres seemed harder to get as the war-years dragged on. The few homes that had radio-sets were crowded every night. There was much speculation as to who was the man with the pleasing voice who used to break through the wave-lengths to announce, "Germany Calling!" Most of the propaganda fell on deaf ears. Few people had any illusions as to how Hitler would treat our country if it was unfortunate enough to get under his jack-boot. For the first time in history, England's difficulty seemed to be ours also. Local Defence and Security units were formed in every area. Men who had fought on opposite sides in the Civil War united again in face of the new menace. The attitude of despondent self-criticism seemed to vanish. Relations between the Police and civilian population were never as good. The fact that we were able to maintain our neutrality in the face of the war conditions of the time was the won-

der of the Great Powers. Ireland did not, despite her neutrality, escape unscathed. A big German plane rained bombs on a factory in Campile, Co. Wexford, killing three girls and wounding many other people. The German authorities expressed regret, and later paid compensation. Dublin was also bombed, with a similar result, on May 30, 1941.

As time went on, the Fianna Fáil party found that despite all their efforts the task of being all things to all men was an impossible one. The Primary School Teachers were not satisfied with the salaries paid to them, and went on strike in an effort to obtain better conditions. When the Government refused to accede to their demands, many of them joined the new political party which was called Clann na Poblachta. On a Sunday in May, 1947, a meeting in support of the party was held in Westport after Mass. One of the speakers was Mr. P. Hastings, N.T. The speaker made a brilliant speech to an apathetic audience, but five words at the end sent a thrill of pleasure through his listeners, and raised a cheer that no political oration could evoke. The words were, "Austie Bourke has been found!"

X

The Story of Austie Bourke

On May 3, 1947, Austie Bourke of Murrisk, who had already made a name for himself in the lore of the sea, sailed in his boat, *Myra,* for Arklow with two companions on board. Off the Galway coast and 65 miles out to sea, a storm engulfed the tiny ship. First the engine failed, then the sails were rent, the compass swept from his hand and the rudder wrenched by a wave. Provisions on board were sufficient for three days. When the *Myra* failed to arrive at Arklow the alarm was raised. From Irish and English radio stations the news was flashed to 'planes and shipping to watch out for the 30 ft. boat. But day followed day and no trace could be found. Prayers for the repose of his soul were offered in his home church during Mass. Everyone had given up hope. That is, everyone but his wife Maria. Like the wife of Hausner, the airman, she scorned every approach to "break the news", saying, "No storm could beat my husband!" Three weeks after he bid her good-bye and 1,200 sea miles later, the Fleetwood trawler *Aigret,* fishing off Barra Head in the Outer Hebrides off Scotland, saw a white distress flag flying from the mast of a small boat. The *Aigret* hove to alongside and kneeling by the mast of the *Myra* — too weak to stand — was Austie Bourke. His two companions, both Wicklow men, were unconscious in the hold

Austie Bourke, 69, had done the impossible. He had saved the boat from foundering with a tiny jib sail and with it had coaxed her, taking course by the stars, into the busy fishing lanes. For three weeks he had neither food nor water nor change of clothes — not even a match to strike a light. Capt. John Brown of the *Aigret* turned

his ship to the nearest port — Oban, 200 miles away — and flashed the news that he was coming. 5,000 people crowded Oban port to greet the men returned from the dead. It took two hours for police to clear a path for the ambulance rushing them to hospital. It was evening back home in Murrisk, and Mrs. Bourke was sitting by the fire waiting, as she had been doing for three weary weeks, when a messenger brought in the telegram stating simply: "Myra arrived Oban. Brought all safe". That night there was dancing at the cross-roads and old people whispered a prayer. Austie Bourke had done it again.

And in Oban Austie was having his three weeks' growth of beard shaved as he slowly related his story to the newspapermen who stormed the little Scottish town to interview him.

He did not know — for his story was printed in a dozen different languages — but these newspapermen acknowledged his feat as a great sea epic, a supreme test of human endurance. But the best tribute paid to Austie was by the old captain of the *Aigret*, who cried for joy when Austie clasped his hand. "Were it not for the iron will and superb seamanship of Mr. Bourke, his boat would certainly have gone down. And despite his weakness and terrible ordeal he threw a line to me and said, 'Captain, save my boat'!" That story had such human-interest appeal that even the B.B.C. headlined it as its first news story for two days running. It was a less sensational but more sincere welcome that greeted Austie Bourke when he returned home that glorious June evening in 1947. There were tears in the eyes of the late Paddy Gibbons, Co. Councillor, as he read an Address of Welcome to Austie when he stepped off the train at Westport Station. Then the long procession of cars the six miles to Murrisk, the children coming to shake the hand of their old hero, who — before fame caught up with him, and indeed to his dying day — had the pennies ready for every child he met. The Grand Old Man was back again, with his simple "God knows best" to round off all his stories.

The pupils of Oban High School in Scotland paid this tribute in verse to this fearless sailor:

It was the good ship *Myra* that sailed the Irish Sea;
A thirty-four foot fishing boat with but a crew of three.
Their skipper good was Austin Bourke, a right brave mariner he,
'Twas he who hailed from fair Westport to sail the calm blue sea.

A sorry plight these men were in when on the twentieth day,
Across the sea not far from them the good ship *Aigret* lay.
Cried Skipper Brown, "Ahoy, a boat, a-fishing bound I say!"
Until the battered sail they spied, towards the break of day.
The shattered ship with limp white sail, its symbol of distress,
Brave Austin Bourke clung to the mast to shout his S.O.S.

The foregoing is an extract taken from a tribute paid to Mr. Bourke by the *Mayo News* on the occasion of his death, and printed in the issue dated July 6, 1957.

XI

Clan Rallies

I HAVE VIVID MEMORIES of the many rallies of the O'Malley Clan which I attended since they were started over twenty years ago. The first was held at Carrigahowley castle, which had been preserved and re-roofed by Sir Owen O'Malley and his family. It was addressed by Lady O'Malley and other prominent members of the Clan, including Mr. Tom O'Malley of Chicago, who was later chosen Guardian Chief. Many other clans held rallies, but the O'Malley gathering is among the few which have stood the test of time, and is still held every year. The one I propose to deal with here was held in 1957, and is reported in the *Mayo News* of August 31 of that year, under the heading, "Belfast Man Points Way Clan Should Go" — By *Mayo News* Reporter:

Murrisk Abbey, the 500 year old monastery founded by the Augustinians, came to life again on Sunday. Here amid the ancient cloisters and walls the Clan O'Malley gathered to commemorate once more deeds of piety and valour of the ancient past. Here they remembered Crom Dubh, who on the very same spot had held a similiar gathering 1,500 years ago. It was here also that he set out on a pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick, a pilgrimage that saw him receive the Faith from Ireland's National Apostle, St. Patrick. In his address the Guardian Chief, John J. O'Malley, said: "A big céad míle fáilte to you all. A thousand welcomes to every one of you. God bless your stout hearts that enabled you to be present at this great gathering here today. It plainly shows that the O'Malley Clan loyalty is no empty boast. I am glad to see with us O'Malleys from overseas, from New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, London, Manches-

ter, Birmingham and Glasgow. God bless them all".

The Guardian Chief outlined the continuity of the pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick up to the time he was speaking and continued, " 'To work is to pray' was the keynote of that Christian philosophy that gave Ireland her Golden Age, and today, if adopted, it would cure her of her economic ills. In the chaos and confusion of modern civilization, where materialism and individualism are at a premium and unfortunately indoctrinating our youth as a nation with sentiments alien to our Irish way of life, it is encouraging to see so many O'Malleys answering the call of the Clan". After describing Clan rallies as a social bulwark against certain evils in Irish life,, Mr. O'Malley concluded, "I feel this annual rally has come to stay".

Mr. Pádraic Pearse O'Malley, Belfast, outgoing Chief, said:

"This country has a melancholy history since Murrisk was founded — with the spirit of the nation underground for centuries. Now in 1957 we look back with regret at the wasted years under alien rule. Without the imagination and drive of the present Committee members, there would not in fact be any rally at all. We are particularly indebted to our Guardian Chief, John J. O'Malley, who holds a special place in the affection of all members, and to the secretaries, Charles, Paddy and Andrew, and to our past Chief, Conor, and to Charles, Chief Elect; and to John, Clare Island Chief. With regard to the future, the more constructive our aims the more valuable our contribution will be.

"I submit the following suggestions for consideration:

1. That each member gains a knowledge of historical landmarks and monuments.
2. Encouragement of voluntary organizations, scholarship and research concerned with economic development of Mayo, the west of Ireland and the country as a whole.
3. Encouragement of Irish cultural and athletic activities. It might be possible to consider the preservation of

works of art for the nation and to sponsor a museum in Westport to serve the West.
4. Encouragement of an interest in civic events and an honourable attitude in public affairs.
5. Encouragement of the closest possible links with Clan members in all parts of Ireland and with our exiles. It might be possible to consider methods of assisting in a practical way the less fortunate of our kinsmen and kinswomen.
6. Representation of the Clan officially at events considered suitable.

"To conclude, let me express the hope that this rally in 1957 is but the fifth milestone in a story of achievement."

Mr. Charles O'Malley, Chief Elect, Limerick, said:

"No place in Ireland could be more fitting for a hosting of the O'Malleys than Murrisk. From the earliest times until about 200 years ago, our clan, Clann Uí Mháille, held an annual Hosting here. This goes back more than 100 years before the coming of St. Patrick and it is a source of pride and satisfaction to our Clan that is was on the top of Croagh Patrick that the then Chief of the O'Malleys was converted to the true faith by St. Patrick himself. Behind us lies Clew Bay, perhaps the most beautiful bay in Ireland, which is to us the Bay of Granuaile. It was from this bay that her galleys set forth and carried their activities for freedom, faith and fatherland.

"Today is also the 500th anniversary of the granting of the land by the O'Malleys to the Augustinian Friars, who founded their abbey and monastery here, which was for so many years the centre of learning, faith and culture in this part of Ireland. In hosting here today we are renewing a tradition of which our clan is justly proud, but also with pride that the will to survive was never destroyed, and that our clan kept faith from the time of Granuaile up to the present day.

"This year we mourn the death, among others, of Ernie O'Malley, who became a symbol in our own time of all who struggle for justice and liberty. It is important to recognize

that the Irish concept of freedom formulated through the centuries has given universal inspiration. It has symbolized not only the struggle of the weak against the strong, where material success was not of primary importance, but also tolerance and justice for the enemy, no matter how tyrannical. It would be a sad day for Ireland if such a high concept of freedom should become debased by an attitude of injustice or intolerance towards an opponent or by inhumanity. I have been asked to convey to clan members appreciation of the heroic qualities and personal integrity of Ernie from a well known Northern poet who differed in religion and political outlook. There can be no higher tribute.

"Since self-government came to most of the country over 35 years ago our generation has had a special privilege but also a special responsibility. For the first time in hundreds of years we have Ireland's destiny in our own hands. It is true that a Northern Pale still exists, with tragic consequences, but there is no longer a struggle for survival as a nation. Few of us here would be satisfied with the present Irish scene, but the gathering of so many members of our clan is a sign that we still have pride in our heritage and the intention to build up a country of which we may all be proud.

"I see in its historical perspective — although political freedom returned in 1921 the hidden Ireland had still to emerge in an articulate form. This new democratic clan gathering is part of the emergence of that Ireland which went underground centuries ago. We are also showing pride in tradition and in an ancient civilization. Our task now is to foster this sense of brotherhood among clan members in every part of the world and to contribute to the cultural and social life of the nation as a whole. In attempting this clan experiment we have special advantages —

1. The O'Malley country is rich in ancient monuments relating to the clan.

2. Many members continue to live in the place of ancestral roots.
3. Members have shown a willingness and an interest to undertake the work of organization.
4. The signs of good will and of practical help are most encouraging.

"Here I would like to pay a tribute on behalf of all members to those who are responsible for the practical work involved in this clan movement.

"This is the centre of the O'Malley country and we come back here to the place from which we sprung, where we have our roots, to renew our inspiration. There is no more lonely person in the world than a man without a family or country and we are thankful that we have a place and people reaching back into the earliest times, and it gives us great pleasure to return to it once a year.

"I am hopeful that not only will the O'Malleys of Ireland gather here in the future, but those of our name and clan from distant places overseas will return in increasing numbers each year to renew their family ties and their clan association."

Dúirt Aindrias Ó Máille, Cathaoirleach Chlann Uí Mháille:

"Céad míle fáilte roimh gach duine agaibh go Cathair na Mart agus Muirisc. Bhí cáil ar na háiteacha seo mar dhúnphoirt ar gclann leis na blianta agus is breá an rud é sibh ar fad, idir óg agus aosta, a fheiceáil bailithe le chéile anseo inniu. Sílim gur anois an t-am le athbheochan a dhéanamh ar ár dteanga, ionas go mbeidh muid in ann páirt a ghlacadh ins gach caithréim trí mheán na Gaeilge feasta."

A reception was held afterwards in Belclare House, and a very enoyable social evening ensued.

At a recent "Cailín Deas" festival in Westport, I was speaking to a German girl who was studying English at Manorhamilton. When the conversation turned to her visit to the West, she showed me a book which seemed to have fascinated her, saying, "I have a book here about the

O'Malleys". I thought it a rather amusing coincidence, as I had not told her my name. The book was *The White Sea Horse*, written by a Westport woman, Eleanor Fairburn. The idea occurred to me that the castles, strongholds and islands of our legendary Sea Queen might have been made a bigger tourist attraction if greater efforts were expended by the bodies responsible for bringing valuable tourist revenue into our area.

XII

Moving to Meath

IN RECORDING MY MEMORIES, I have concentrated for the most part on those which occurred at the most impressionable period of my life. There were others which, although coming at a later period, were of no less importance. I am referring to the migration of tenants from my native district to the fertile plains of Meath, from which their ancestors had been driven by the British hundreds of years ago. This operation, which was carried out by the Irish Land Commission, must be unique in world history. The aristocracy, which had been backed by the armed forces of the most powerful empire in the world, was being replaced by the "bold peasantry", not as vassals, but as prosperous farmers with every modern amenity in their beautiful homes.

In the early 1930s four tenants were moved to holdings not far from the historic Hill of Tara. They were Edward J. MacManus, John O'Malley, Thomas Duffy and Richard McGreal. Mr. MacManus played a prominent part in having the transfers carried out. He had been a member of the old District Council, and later, during the War of Independence, was engaged in valuable work for the Freedom Fighters in Leeds, despite constant surveillance by the police. An editorial in the *Mayo News*, which was always the champion of the people, was devoted to the episode, and a personal letter from Mr. MacManus to Mr. P. J. Doris, the Editor, was published at the time. Three other tenants from the area had, some years before, been given holdings in the Deer Park near Murrisk. They were Michael Sammon, John McGreal and James McGreal.

In 1955 another family was moved to Oldcastle, Co.

Meath. The *Mayo News* dated May 21, 1955, carried the following report:

A farm house . . . recalls to mind the days when soldiers were hounded and a coffin was their armory, and a bribe of £2,000 found no traitor to take it.

Last week John Kearns, his wife and five children left a thatched house in Owenwee, near Westport, to take up residence in their new Meath farm. But the historical associations of the old house link it to a cross-roads in Irish history. It was there that the West Mayo Flying Column of the I.R.A. met as a fighting unit for the last time on July 1, 1921. And it was in that house that John Kearns — himself an active member of the I.R.A. — penned this note to Comdt. Joe Ring: "The British Forces at Westport have a life-size photograph of you. You will be shot at sight and your body will be dragged through the streets of Westport. This information comes direct from enemy H.Q". Harrassed by thousands of British troops, the gallant band under General Michael Kilroy held a Council of War in Mr. Kearns' home on July 1. Some favoured fighting it out in a last desperate stand. The majority felt it would be futile, and would mean the total destruction of all the fighting men and arms in the Brigade area. They decided to dump their arms and retire farther into the mountains. The guns were then collected and placed in a felt-covered, coffin-shaped box and left in charge of the local I.R.A. men. These men had volunteered to carry on the fight if the members of the Column, who were all marked men, were captured or shot. And in the words of an old campaigner: "Ireland's hopes were not going to be buried in that dark coffin".

Next morning, July 2, 1921, heavy cavalry units, assisted by air-patrols, moved into Owenwee. All the adults in this Croagh Patrick-side hamlet were rounded up and questioned. The officer in charge read out the notice that a reward of £2,000 was being offered for Joe Ring and his comrades. But an ominous silence greeted him. Joe Ring and his boys were safe in their mountain hideout. The

rounded-up men were asked to cheer for the King. They refused, and one man who refused to address the officer as "Sir" was struck with a riding whip. But the dark coffin still held its secret.

And so at the farewell dance to the Kearns family the young soldiers of Owenwee F.C.A. danced gaily in their green uniforms whilst outside — the older men fancied — there echoed the distant foot-steps of that vanished army for whom the wearing of such a uniform meant torture and death.

A program on education that I have just seen on television naturally brings back memories of my own school days.

The teacher was complaining that the place where he taught was not properly heated, despite repeated complaints to several people, including the Minister for Education. In the old days we were hardly aware of the existence of such persons; if they did exist they were as remote from the realities of life to us as the leprechauns who made shoes sitting under mushrooms. We simply did something about it by each child bringing two sods of turf under his arm every day. The sum total was enough to provide a blazing fire in the spacious fire-place. There was little talk about the curriculum, but we had to learn more about the Bramaputra than we did about the river that ran a hundred yards from our homes. We learned Irish one half-hour in the week, but we had an inspector for that language in addition to the one who examined us in English twice a year.

Every book of memories must have some chapter tinged with sadness, and the following brings tears to the eyes, although twenty years have elapsed since that fatal October day in 1957 when two Board of Works engineers, Mr. John Twohig, B.E., Westport, and Mr. Brendan O'Beirne, parked their car at Roonagh and set sail for Clare Island, never to return. Martin Duffy, owner of the curach, Isaac Walsh and Bridie O'Toole, Inisturk, who joined the party in Clare

Island on her way to England, shared the same fate when the ill-fated curach was overturned on the return journey with the loss of all lives. The heart-rending details of the disaster were reported in the *Mayo News* dated November 2, 1957.

The same issue contained the following tribute to Martin Duffy, the owner of the curach, by Michael Foy:

THE CRUEL SEA CONQUERED THE BRAVEST SAILOR OF THEM ALL

Roonagh is a village with its heart torn out. For Martin Duffy was the heart and soul of everything in this hamlet of a dozen homes, where the treacherous Atlantic growls at the end of the road. There the tradition of seafaring is strong. There old James McKeon earned the name of a great seaman — earned it with nerves of steel and a heart of gold. When a little boy, his nephew came to live with him and followed in his footsteps. Martin Duffy learned to love the sea, wrestled with it in all its moods. And no one thought it could master him. He braved it when other good sailors failed. He always won . . .

In 1945 a Clare Island yawl, manned by John McNamara and Michael O'Malley, was attempting to negotiate that evil-looking, rock-skirted approach to Roonagh in a sou'-sou'-wester gale. Tacking failed to bring the craft about and she hit the rocks with a rasping, grating crash which wrenched two of her planks away. McNamara on her bows was hurled into the sea and O'Malley, trying to rid her of ballast, was left looking hopelessly from a slanting deck into a hold where only an empty porter barrel bobbed up and down in the waters pouring in through a damaged keel. Lucky for these two sailors that Martin Duffy was on the quay. With him was neighbour Dick McEvilly. They did not wait to raise an alarm but pushed their curach out. Soon O'Malley was safe ashore. Then Duffy swam through the ebb and flow of the breakers and saved the other sailor too. "He thought so little of these things, he'd only laugh

if you mentioned them," said a neighbour.

But these things picture the character of the man as clearly as the broad smile of confidence he had for his passengers as they set out on that ill-fated voyage from Clare Island. There were tears in the eyes of his cousin, a tall, broad-shouldered man, as he told me: "Oh, to think that the man who risked his life for others had no one to come to his aid when he so desperately needed it. No one at all. And then the few who came, came too late". But there was resignation — pure and unselfish — in the words of his uncle: "Martin is gone and we are left. We will do our best". That is the way it is. The cruel, cruel sea — its snarling can be heard in every home there — has etched an indelible sorrow in the hearts of the people of Roonagh who loved their 35-year-old, curly-haired neighbour as only communities who live so close to nature can. Small wonder that sturdy men wept when infant Julia Anne Martina met Seamus and Mary in that fatherless Duffy home on Saturday night. Still in my ears is the bellowing of the waves — pounding their requiem on the rocks of Roonagh.

XIII

"Laochra Gael"

AT THE BEGINNING of this book, I failed to give an account of two men whose names must be always linked with Ireland's struggle for freedom. They were on the same platform in Westport on St. Patrick's Day, 1916. One was The O'Rahilly, who three months later gave his life in the Rising. Military prisoners who were kept in the General Post Office were under the direct care of The O'Rahilly, and they agree he was very considerate to his captives. He was the head of an old Kerry clan, and had a private income of £900 a year, which, it is believed, he largely devoted to the cause he espoused. For years he was a keen worker in the Irish language movement, and a member of the governing body of the Gaelic League. He travelled extensively on the Continent, and spent several years in the United States. On Easter Monday he spent the day motoring through the country and countermanding the orders that had been given, but when the fatal step was taken in Dublin, he went ahead, and took up a post in the General Post Office. This account is from the *Sinn Féin Rebellion Hand-book.*

The other man on the platform was Patrick Tunney, Derrykellew, Westport. He wrote patriotic poems in *Old Moore's Almanack* and other journals, and his writings kept the spirit of nationhood alive in the people. He was among the first to be arrested after the Rising and sent to Frongoch Jail. The *Mayo News* published a series of his articles entitled "From Derrykellew to Frongoch" which told of his experiences. After his release he became active again in taking care of the arms for the Flying Column, in transit to Owenwee and other centres. In answer to a query in

the *Almanack* as to why he was not writing as many poems as formerly, he wrote:

When Pearse and his brave colleagues raised the Orange, White and Green
To float anew o'er free men true, in Easter Week, Sixteen.
I nailed my colours to the mast, prepared for the campaign,
And I pledged my true allegiance to poor Ireland and Sinn Féin.

Other Westport men arrested included: Barty Cryan, Thomas Derrig, High St., Michael Derrig, Octagon, Michael Duffy, Bridge St., Edward Gannon, High St., Martin Geraghty, James St., John Gavin, Murrisk, Owen Hughes, Lankill, Hubert Heraty, Altamount St., Edward Haran, Charles Hickey, Manus Keane, Cloonskill, Patrick Kenny, John Lohan, John McDonagh, James Malone, Thomas O'Brien, Moyhasten, Joseph Ruddy, Joseph Ring, Drummindoo, Edward Sammon, Peter St., Thaddeus Walsh, Thomas Ralph and John Berry, Lanmore. These men were sent to Wandsworth Jail on May 16, 1916. With them was Arthur Griffith.

XIV

Today — and Tomorrow

THE IMPROVEMENT IN the general living conditions of the Irish people can only be appreciated by someone who was familiar with the state of affairs that existed in the earlier part of the present century. It is no exaggeration to say that it surpasses the wildest hopes of the people of that time. The different political parties elected by the people during that period to administer the affairs of the nation have each contributed their part in bringing to fruition the hopes of those who were ready to give up even life itself for an ideal which they knew could bring them no material benefit. With more co-operation, greater achievements might have been attained but, human nature being what it is, complete unanimity in public affairs is inconceivable. Destructive criticism of worthwhile projects for Party interests should be scorned, however.

It used to be said in bygone days that the natives fled from Ireland as from a plague. This state of mind has been completely reversed. Most young people have acquired a more positive attitude towards their native land, which has no emotive connotations, but the simple fact that they find it a better place to live in than they would hope to find in any other land. I remember a lady in a railway carriage on the way to Knock emphasising the faults of the Irish people in general rather vigorously. When I asked her if she had any experience of other races or peoples, and she admitted that she had not, I did not pursue the conversation, but I noticed the other occupants of the carriage exchanging knowing glances. I hasten to add that she was not one of the much-maligned younger generation.

The recording of these "Memories" is not meant as an exercise in living in the past. The pattern of the past is inextricably woven into that of the present and the future. Perhaps we might learn from our past mistakes, and take pride in our achievements. We are a people with a great potential if it could be directed into the proper channel by far-seeing leaders. We should have faith in God, in ourselves and in the future.

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BEATHA CHOLM CILLE Anraí Mac Giolla Chomhaill £5

This absorbing book, which proves the axiom that "truth is stranger than fiction", includes among other anecdotes a first-hand account of the Irish War of Independence in the West Mayo Brigade area, as experienced by a member of the rank and file of the Volunteers.

In the opening chapters the author traces the reaction of his generation to the events which preceded and followed the Rising of 1916. Then he delineates the clash of personalities and the divided loyalties which followed the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921.

The years of bloody strife and high drama were succeeded by the inevitable return to mundane conditions of men whose minds had been geared to conflict. Their adjustment to the rigours of immigrant life in Britain and America was often painful.

The characters in this book are not legendary heroes but real-life figures, the author being a participant rather than an observer. Intermittent flashes of humour offset the seriousness of some otherwise tragic encounters.

The author, Edward O'Malley, was born in Owenwee, Westport, in 1904, the youngest of six children. He was educated at Brackloon National School and later at the Central Evening High School, Philadelphia.

He joined B Coy., 3rd Batt., West Mayo Brigade, Irish Volunteers, in 1921. After the "Cease fire" he emigrated and led a varied life in Britain and America before returning to Ireland to settle down in his native place in 1937.

£2.40

FNT • Edward O'Malley • MEMORIES OF A MAYOMAN