UNCOLLECTED PROSE OF
James Stephens
VOLUME 2 1916-48

EDITED BY PATRICIA McFATE

UNCOLLECTED PROSE OF JAMES STEPHENS
Volume 2, 1916–48

James Stephens was an adventurous writer, exploring all the territories of prose. He wrote fiction, essays, radio scripts, literary reviews, drama, journalistic reports as well as other forms of literature.

His career began in 1907 with a modest essay in an Irish nationalist journal, and proceeded for forty-three years until the last of his broadcasts on the BBC shortly before his death at his home in London in 1950. During this period, Stephens progressed from talented amateur to highly-regarded professional, from an unknown essayist to a prominent writer, and from an author of printed works to a popular radio commentator. While his career progressed, his reputation as an artist increased to the point where he enjoyed the admiration of W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, George Moore and George Russell and where his abilities persuaded James Joyce to ask him to complete *Finnegans Wake* if Joyce could not do so.

While these two volumes are by no means a complete collection of Stephens' prose, this is the first time his work has been collected in this way and the pieces are carefully chosen to demonstrate the development of his artistic craftmanship. Readers of this edition who may know Stephens as the beloved author of *The Crock of Gold, The Charwoman's Daughter* and other novels, can observe him in a variety of other roles: as political journalist, dramatist, speaker, critic, and storyteller.

The editor

Patricia A. McFate is President of the American–Scandinavian Foundation in New York. Her previous appointments have included Deputy Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Vice Provost of the University of Pennsylvania and she has taught at City College of New York, Northwestern University, and the Universities of Illinois and Pennsylvania. She has held scientific appointments in the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences of Columbia University and Rush Medical College and is a Fellow of the New York Academy of Sciences.

Dr. McFate is the author of *The Writings of James Stephens: Variations on a Theme of Love.*

Also by Patricia A. McFate

THE DREAM PHYSICIAN by Edward Martyn (*editor*)
EDUCATION FOR THE ITINERANT STUDENT
THE WRITINGS OF JAMES STEPHENS: Variations on a Theme of Love

Portrait of the Author as a Celebrity: James Stephens Reading his Works over the Radio in New York.

Uncollected Prose of James Stephens

Volume 2, 1916–48

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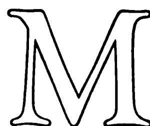

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For UWL

Verse is a manifesting of the angel in man,
but prose is an unburying of the god.
On Prose and Verse (1928)

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Preface

James Stephens was a witty conversationalist and a versatile writer. One of the 'Great Talkers of Dublin', he wrote novels, poems, essays, literary criticism, drama, short fiction, journalistic reports, speeches and radio scripts. His quickness of thought, lack of affectation, and warmth endeared him to generations of readers and listeners. This edition of his prose celebrates his love of words and gives evidence of his literary dexterity.

While these volumes are by no means a complete collection, the fifty-nine items which have been selected place Stephens in a variety of settings and time periods, offer ideas – serious or comical – of interest to contemporary readers, and give an opportunity to observe Stephens' development as a literary craftsman.

Prefaces and other contributions to books could not be included in the space allowed for the two volumes. Book reviews and several magazine articles in which Stephens was a member of a panel of literary experts could not be accommodated. The radio scripts published in *The Listener* and subsequently printed in *James, Seumas & Jacques* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1964) have not been reprinted in this edition. With two exceptions, the items included in these volumes have not appeared in book form. The exceptions, 'Julia Elizabeth' and 'How St Patrick Saves the Irish', were privately printed and had a limited readership.

The prose pieces included in this edition have been edited to remove typographical errors and obvious mistakes in spelling and grammar; but the diction and syntax have been left unchanged in order to reflect Stephens' prose at the time of its creation. Quotations from the *Letters of James Stephens* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1974) which have been used in the introductions to sections of this edition are cited as *Letters*.

Inevitably, there will be readers who will regret the omission of a familiar item. The editor joins them in their regret, but hopes that they will find a new favourite among those pieces printed here.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge my profound gratitude to Iris Wise, James Stephens' stepdaughter, and her husband Norman, who, over many years, have encouraged my research on the subject of James Stephens' writing. Their generosity and patience, and the many kindnesses of Sarkes Tarzian, have made this edition possible. There are no words which sufficiently express my appreciation of my three friends.

Others who have contributed their knowledge of Ireland and Irish literature to my efforts include: Professor Richard Finneran, Dr Lola Szladits, Professor Maurice Harmon, Mrs Mona Moore, Professor Richard Ellmann, Dr Eoin McKiernan. The staff of the National Endowment for the Humanities, although not direct participants in the project, provided the collegial atmosphere necessary to undertake research. The work of Professor Jacob Neusner has always been a model of scholarly excellence for me. My recent association with Mr Leiv Arntzen, the Trustees, and the staff of the American–Scandinavian Foundation has allowed me to finish my work in an environment encouraging of scholarship. The staff of the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library has been very helpful.

In addition, I would like to thank: Mary Bain, Joseph Bordogna, Giorgio Bugliarello, Alexander Crary, Michael Dorf, Lewis Freedman, Iola Gardner, Stephen Garrett and his family, Larry Gross, Sanford Harris, Robert Hollander, Phyllis Hubbell, Demetrius Karayn, Everett Keech, Richard Lyman, Frank Mankiewicz, Philip Marcus, Michael Millman, Peggy Monaghan, David Parson, Norma and Eugene Snyder, Mary, Bruce and Sean Spivey, Judith Walker, Harry Wellington, and the Honourable Sidney R. Yates. Ric Kallaher has been a very understanding assistant. Brooke Lappin, Bruce Kellerhouse, and my friends from the Nordic countries have been patient colleagues.

I will always be indebted to my father and mother and their families for their initial encouragement of my career. This project

would not have begun nor would it have been completed without Rodney Wayson Nichols.

For permission to quote from the printed works and manuscripts of James Stephens, and to reproduce the two photographs for the frontispieces, I am indebted to Iris Wise and the Society of Authors, London (James Stephens Texts, © 1983, Mrs Iris Wise). Quotations from the *Letters of James Stephens* are reprinted by permission of Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, and Macmillan, New York. The Chronology first appeared in *The Writings of James Stephens* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979). The typescript of *The Demi-Gods* is reprinted by permission of Robert Hogan, Editor, *Journal of Irish Literature*.

Chronology

1882 (2 February). Date of birth used by Stephens.

1886–96 Attended Meath Protestant Industrial School for Boys. (Conjecture)

1896 Employed as a clerk by a Dublin solicitor, Mr Wallace.

1901 On a gymnastic team which won the Irish Shield. Employed by Reddington & Sainsbury, solicitors.

1906 Employed as a clerk-typist in the office of T. T. Mecredy & Son, solicitors.

1907 Began regular contributions to *Sinn Féin*. Birth of stepdaughter, Iris, on 14 June; shortly thereafter announced that he had a wife, 'Cynthia' (Millicent Josephine Gardiner Kavanagh, 22 May 1882 to 18 December 1960). Discovered by George W. Russell (A. E.).

1909 Acted in the Theatre of Ireland's two productions of Seumas O'Kelly's *The Shuiler's Child*. Birth of son, James Naoise, on 26 October. *Insurrections*.

1910 Acted in the Theatre of Ireland production of Gerald Macnamara's *The Spurious Sovereign*. Associated with David Houston, Thomas MacDonagh, and Padraic Colum in founding and editing the *Irish Review* (published March 1911 to November 1914).

1911 Acted in Padraic O Conaire's *Bairbre Ruadh*. *The Marriage of Julia Elizabeth* produced by the Theatre of Ireland.

1912 *The Charwoman's Daughter*; *The Hill of Vision*; *The Crock of Gold*.

1913 Received a commission from the *Nation* (London) to write a series of short stories. Moved to Paris. Another production of *The Marriage of Julia Elizabeth* at the Hardwicke Street Theatre. *The Crock of Gold* awarded the Polignac Prize. *Here Are Ladies*; *Five New Poems*.

1914 *The Demi-Gods*.

1915 Elected Unestablished Registrar of the National Gallery of Ireland. *Songs from the Clay*; *The Adventures of Seumas Beg/The Rocky Road to Dublin*.

1916 *Green Branches*; *The Insurrection in Dublin.*
1918–24 Appointed Registrar of the National Gallery of Ireland.
1918 *Reincarnations.*
1919 Married 'Cynthia' (then a widow) in London on 14 May.
1920 *The Wooing of Julia Elizabeth* (another version of *The Marriage of Julia Elizabeth*) produced at the Abbey Theatre by the Dublin Drama League. One of a series of operations for gastric ulcers. *Irish Fairy Tales.*
1922 *Arthur Griffith: Journalist and Statesman.*
1923 *Deirdre.*
1924 *Deirdre* presented the medal for fiction at the *Aonach Tailteann* festival. Resigned from the National Gallery (effective 1925). *Little Things*; *In the Land of Youth.*
1925 On lecture tour in America. Returned to London; shortly thereafter settled in the Kingsbury suburb of London. To America for another lecture tour. *A Poetry Recital*; *Christmas in Freelands.*
1926 *Collected Poems.*
1927 Friendship with James Joyce commenced. Joyce suggested that Stephens complete *Finnegans Wake* if he was unable to do so; this proposal made more formally in 1929.
1928 First BBC broadcast. Lecturer at the Third International Book Fair in Florence. *Etched in Moonlight*; *On Prose and Verse.*
1929 In Rumania; met Queen Marie. Trip to America; stay with W. T. H. Howe. *Julia Elizabeth: A Comedy in One Act*; *The Optimist*; *The Outcast.*
1930 Trip to America; stay with Howe. *Theme and Variations.*
1931 Trip to America; stay with Howe. *How St Patrick Saves the Irish*; *Strict Joy.*
1932 Trip to America; stay with Howe. A founder member of the Irish Academy of Letters.
1933–5 Yearly lecture tours to America; visits with Howe.
1937 Began regular series of BBC broadcasts. Accidental death of son, James Naoise, on 24 December.
1938 *Kings and the Moon.*
1940 Moved to Woodside Chapel in Gloucestershire.
1942 Awarded British Civil List Pension.
1945 Returned to London.
1947 Awarded honorary D. Litt. degree from Dublin University (Trinity College).
1950 Final BBC broadcast. Died at his home, Eversleigh, on 26 December.

Prose Writings: 1916–25

The influence of historical events upon the work of modern Irish writers is profound; nowhere is this more easily shown than with James Stephens. On the day of the Easter Rising of 1916, Stephens was on his way back to the National Gallery after luncheon at home. While walking to the Gallery, he learned of the event, saw a barricade, and witnessed the shooting of a man. He had known Thomas MacDonagh, and had quarrelled with him over politics; but although he was not a party to the planning of the Rising, he was deeply moved by the patriotism which he observed during the week of upheaval. After the Rising was quelled, Stephens produced two works: a simple, eloquent journalistic account, *The Insurrection in Dublin*, and a beautifully constructed poem, 'Green Branches.'

Stephens' patriotic feelings may have been high before Easter Monday, but they were unfocused. 'God Bless the Work,' written for *New Ireland* before the Rising, contains his usual ideas, including praise for three organizations to which his friends belonged – the Irish Agricultural Society, the Gaelic language movement, and the Volunteer movement. His journalistic pieces after the event are tough in tone, clear in message. 'In the Interval' concludes that Ireland should look to itself for its freedom. A companion essay, 'In the Silence,' condemns Irish politicians for not speaking up on behalf of Roger Casement. 'Conscription and the Return of the Dog' suggests that English military conscription might lead to repressive acts against the Irish. 'Pamphlets' argues that leaflets are a way around censorship of the press.

To express his love for his country, Stephens wrote on contemporary politics; but he searched for other ways to give of himself. He had not been able to write his major opus about Ireland. *Any Man's House*, which was intended to be his fourth novel, had started and stopped. But he still had ideas for short stories, and 1917 seemed a good year to create them.

Several of the short stories he submitted to magazines between 1918 and 1920 were later collected in *Etched in Moonlight* (1928). The works found in that volume set a tone of darkness, a sombre mood which is also reflected in the four short stories included in this edition of his uncollected prose, 'Crêpe de Chine,' 'Sawdust,' 'The Birthday Party,' and 'The Thieves.' In three of the works, the Irish

elements of the story have been reduced to occasional references to streets and regions of Dublin; 'Sawdust,' however, depends upon an understanding of the dominant role of the Church in Ireland, and the effects of conscription, poverty, and loneliness on the lives of the Irish people. The best written of the four stories, it is reminiscent of 'Hunger,' Stephens' extraordinary short story in which the agonizing circumstances of poverty and starvation are quietly and meticulously detailed.

In 1919 Stephens contributed two articles, on the Irish people and on Irish mythology, to the London *Times*. The essays are remarkable because they signal the beginning of a conciliatory attitude toward England which would culminate in Stephens' move to London in 1925.

He had described familiar Dublin faces in 'Caricatures,' a sketch for *Sinn Féin* written in 1910. A street scene in his first novel, *The Charwoman's Daughter*, presented capsule descriptions of his friends, A. E., Yeats, Synge and Moore. For 'Dublin,' Stephens redraws Yeats and A. E., but adds figures which might interest English readers: Shaw, Bennett and Chesterton. Even in this light-hearted look at his city, he cannot resist a brief political message: he argues that Dublin should get rid of her tramway system and her Paving Committee and replace them with a bus system and a Parliament.

'Mythology: Quaint Tales of Origination' looks forward to a new writing project, the creation of literature based upon the ancient Gaelic mythological tales. Coming later than Yeats, Synge, Lady Gregory, and others to the notion of using saga and folk tales as literary source material, Stephens caught on quickly after 1916. Inspired by the Easter Rising, he determined to aid the national cause in his own way: by writing modern versions of the stories. His literary adaptations differ markedly from those of other writers of the Literary Revival in that his are filled with warmth, good humour, and an easy narration which recalls the style of the shanachies, those Irish story-tellers who blended supernatural acts and realistic details into stories which both entertained and taught.

In 1913 Stephens' patron, W. T. H. Howe, had suggested that he write a book of Irish fairy tales for children. The idea lay dormant until August 1918 when Sir Frederick Macmillan suggested a book of fairy tales without specifying the projected audience. Stephens must have recalled his frequently reiterated statement that a national culture is the first step toward nationhood. It was an opportunity to pay homage to the heroes of the Rising and he seized

it. By November 1918 he had completed versions of four tales which found their way into *Irish Fairy Tales* and *In the Land of Youth*. He now planned to write five novels based on the ancient Irish saga, *Táin Bó Cualigne* (The Cattle Raid of Cooley). Two of the novels were completed – *Deirdre* and *In the Land of Youth* – before the project was abandoned in 1925.

When Clement Shorter, founder and editor of the *Sphere*, asked him to write two articles explaining the background of a play, *The Immortal Hour*, he was delighted because it allowed him to compose a different version of *Tochmarc Etainé* (The Wooing of Etain), a saga story he was using for his novel, *In the Land of Youth*. The articles appeared in the *Sphere* in December 1923; in June 1924 Stephens sent a triumphal letter to Sir Frederick Macmillan, followed by the manuscript of his fifth novel:

> The entire second part [of the novel] gives the story (now I think fully told for the first time) of Midir and Etain – a version of which is, at present, playing in London under the title of the 'Immortal Hour.' It is a very wonderful story, but Fiona McLeod only had a scrap of it.
>
> (*Letters*, p. 309)

Although Deirdre quite literally 'took the prize' (the Aonach Tailteann medal for literature was awarded to his novel *Deirdre*), he told his friend S. K. Ratcliffe that Etain was the girl of his dreams: 'In that second half of Land of Youth, there is the sole & only desirable woman in modern fiction, she is enough!' (*Letters*, p. 340)

When not writing literature, Stephens wrote about writing. In the articles he produced for *Atlantic, Century Magazine*, and the *Irish Statesman*, he holds that the artist is inextricably linked to his community or country. If the country provides a vital atmosphere, the artist in turn reflects and enhances this environment. When a country is 'young,' and a writer energetic, there is a synergistic effect that builds excitement in the artist and his or her audience.

Stephens extends these interesting notions to an odd and illogical extreme in two articles. 'The Outlook for Literature' and 'An Interview with Mr James Stephens.' In the first essay, he seems surprisingly harsh on himself and other writers in the Anglo-Irish tradition, for example, W. B. Yeats and A. E.: 'What even in these hasty terms, does Irish literature in the English tongue stand for? Irish fiction, Irish poetry, with the most pitifully few exceptions, are

only timid and ineffectual imitations of the English mode.' Such a condemnatory view explains, perhaps, his insistence on the extremes of authorial modesty in the latter article. While using the pseudonym of James Esse, a pen-name he had employed in 1916 for more serious essays in *New Ireland*, he maintains that 'Mr Stephens' has said that all books should be anonymous, published by a State Department, and known by numbers rather than titles.

By 1923 civil war was raging in Ireland, and Stephens was longing to escape. He wrote his patron and friend, W. T. H. Howe:

> Things here are much as they were. Guns go off every night, and bombs are thrown, or, which is a newer delight, land-mines are exploded. It has all come to seem meaningless, and I expect it will stop shortly. For my part I begin to feel the wanderlust again, and would like to pull up my stakes and go to America for a few years – to see how it is and what it is. I know America (most of us here do) largely from the novels of Zane Grey.
>
> (*Letters*, p. 285)

In 1925 he made his wished-for trip to America; his first lecture tour began in January, hardly an auspicious time to travel. He also made a more lasting and difficult move: from Dublin to England where he resided for the rest of his life. Both journeys were questioned by his friends who believed that the lecture tours would drain his energy and that his removal from the Irish scene would impede creativity. However questionable their premises, their conclusions proved out: 1925 marked the beginning of a period of illness, depression, and exhaustion in which limited writing was done by Stephens.

God Bless the Work

by James Esse

The war, as it affects England, presents entirely a national character, and in that country every other interest is subservient to it. This does not mean that political quarrels have ceased, but they have been driven underground, and however the inveterate politicians may mine and countermine in the depths, they dare not come to the surface without the gravest danger to themselves and their hopes. Their aims are in general confined to 'after the war', and one of the signs of the drawing nigh of peace will be the ascent of the politician. But although English politics may, as the novelists say, cause the Chancelleries of Europe to shake, they have almost no importance to Irish people, outside, that is, of the interest which binds a mind anywhere to an event anywhere else. When they sow good seed we seldom are permitted to wield a sickle in the harvest, and if they sow thorns it does not affect us very much. We are, by geography and by English desire, outside of their government, and we are, by national will, incapable of being drawn into it. Whatever of good or evil England had to give this country she has already given, and as a sponge that is full of water cannot hold any more, so this country cannot absorb anything further of ideas or ideals or manners or literature from her powerful neighbour.

It is the cause of our stagnation – we are unable to accept anything more from England and we have not yet learned to sink our own shafts and work our own mines. This is, and must be, the next stage of our national progress, and from this alone one may gather the certitude that the future of Ireland is secure, and that it is not by any means under the brim of Mr Redmond's hat.

It is not among the political activities of any nation that we should seek information about that country, for politics and trade the world over present the same features of treachery and robbery, and in both these great centres the machine has been captured and

the brigands cannot be disbanded without revolution. Before there can be any political or economic change, before there can be any change whatever, there must be a social change, and it is to the social sphere that we must turn for national information.

Ireland, and for how long, and by reason of what ill-health and congestion, has been in politics up to the chaps; that tide is receding, and is now no more than above our knees. Everywhere we begin to find an impatience of politics and a growing belief that the political pill is made of soap, and poor soap at that. Social life in Ireland is steadily swinging away from the politician and is as steadily swinging towards some idea of a social order and a conservation of the national energy. Social life in the world is swinging away from the established economist, and towards some point entirely uncertain, but entirely different from the one with which we are acquainted.

In Ireland, within these latter years, there have been three movements of sufficient magnitude to be called national; two of these are entirely social in their scope, and the third, with a little defining, can be called social also. On them it is possible that the future of Ireland rests, and it is on them that all Irish thought should be focussed – they are, the Co-operative movement, the Gaelic movement, and the Volunteer movement. They are all co-operative movements. They are all, at this stage, unselfish and finely human movements, and their values must be expressed in terms of thought instead of terms of cash. Co-operation, then, is the word that opens our new generation – God bless the work!

New Ireland
22 April 1916

In the Interval

by James Esse

Within the past few months our political life has suffered so violent a change that almost nothing remains of it. Nothing but its centre; the idea that Ireland is our country, and that we must now do better for her than we have ever done, and that now we must redeem our promises, and strive to redeem many of our boasts.

And now again our political horizon has become obscure and we do not know exactly where we are nor in what direction we must go. In the life of a nation nothing is final, and this also is no more than a temporary obstruction and will be swept away. In a short time our course will again be clear and that on which Ireland has set her heart will come to her. National desire forces national events, and our country has desired too profoundly, too consistently to be cheated.

I do not expect freedom to be given us by the die-hards. Their antagonism to this country is so real, and has such twisted strands of interest and caste and power and historical recollection, that nothing save superior necessity will override their enmity. The superior necessity before which they must bow or be broken is already a fact; it will become an imperative one, and were it not for ugly immediacies these people could be left out of our account. The political geography of Europe is changing but I do not believe the change will be felt anywhere so profoundly as in England after the war. She is still disliked by every nation and every nation is still envious of her.

As to which side will win in the vast military struggle that is forward no one knows, and, so alike are aims of all these powers, it might almost be said that no one cares. Freedom, justice, culture – these words are used by all the combatants, but in whatever tongue they are uttered they really signify servitude, force, and privilege; and so far as the neutral is concerned he only knows that, howl they

never so gently, the wolves are howling. A man may develop a fine carelessness as to the result when the proposition is whether he shall be eaten by this wolf or that wolf.

We may not look to any state for abstract qualities, nor indeed for any quality which implies disinterestedness. The prime function of a state is organisation, and it is doubtful if beyond that it has any function. And in every country the state is protected against disinterestedness by the fact that its power is lodged in the hands of those whose interests are immediately menaced by disinterestedness. A country in the situation of Ireland must make up its mind that the state cannot assist it, and would not if it could. She must learn to fabricate or create all that she understands by the word freedom, for until she has defined the term the fact is not possible; and when she has done so the state will fall into line; for although the state cannot give anything it can sanction the *fait accompli*, and it cannot sanction anything but that. This is the metaphysic that lies behind the words Sinn Féin. Beware of the state when it is generous. It gave five shillings as weekly pension to certain aged people, and it put an iron on the wrist of every man and woman in the country.

Carried to its ultimate conclusion organisation means slavery for someone, and Europe is so organised to-day that the escape of man from slavery seems almost beyond hope, and would be hopeless did we not know that every power organises at last its own destruction. It was capital organised trades-unionism, and when the men of Europe weary of killing each other they may turn on the state that organised them and kill it. It is too romantic an idea, but the mind rejects the idea of slavery and postulates something entirely unknown and to which we have given the name of freedom. I believe we shall get political freedom in Ireland, that is, we shall have liberty to permit certain of our countrymen to plunder us in the name of the law and order, but until we have fashioned freedom as an individual possession it must remain an ideal and a dream.

Power tends inevitably to come into as few hands as is possible: then its historical perfection is reached, and then only can its strength or its limitations be judged and attacked. All other attacks are futile and succeed only in making change without difference. Plus ça change plus c'est la même chose. The same law applies to wealth. Its tendency is central, and when it has found its centre it finds its grave. Property is different, however, and must find the greatest extension possible. Naturally at some point on the journey wealth and power become the same thing. It is the position at this

epoch, and will increasingly become the political and social fact of our age. The state and money have already assumed control, and in highly industrialised countries such as England and Germany the servile state is already in being, and the social and political aspects of these lands assist the belief that it has come to stay. The idea of organisation has been unchecked by the idea of freedom, and the people of these lands are truly slaves. Bad as is the condition in Ireland we are not yet in that predicament, and our traditional policy of being against the government may preserve us from being proletarian as it has preserved us from becoming Englishmen.

New Ireland
12 August 1916

In the Silence

by James Esse

Only a few months ago the Irish situation was so exceedingly complicated that one could scarcely look on it and preserve one's sanity. But since the recent rebellion it has been simplifying daily, and is now so lucid that even a stupid person may look at it and understand what he sees. This emerges, that so far as England is concerned we are no longer a thorn in her flesh nor a drag upon her wheel. We do not count any more and there is peace between the two islands. That the famous Irish Question is settled can be seen from the fact that Roger Casement has been hanged, for if Ireland had been really disaffected he would not have been hanged. Into the rights or wrongs of this execution I will not go – such a thing happened and such another thing followed as its sequel, so logic is satisfied if nothing else is, and as for death we will all some day be as dead as our fathers are.

But there is a domestic aspect to this case which to one who lacks a political training is puzzling. Very many English papers were

persistent and often passionate in their plea that mercy should be shown to the condemned man. Perhaps they were merely sentimental. Perhaps they were patriotically concerned that their nation should be famed for righteousness and loved for mercy. It does not matter whence the impulse came; they did extend that grace to one of our people, and to one who was in sore need of a kind word or a pitying one. From Ireland there arose no such plea, and neutral observers may have marvelled that our acquiescence in an Irish gentleman's death was so facile. There were, of course, reasons for this. Our newspapers were subject to a strict censorship, our people, our land had bowed under martial law. These, if one must absolutely find reasons, were reasons; but while they may account for the silence of the country they do not explain the silence of our privileged representatives, for we still have the Irish Party intact, and are they not all honourable men! They were elected to fight Ireland's battle and to protect Irishmen, but the guilt of Roger Casement must have been very apparent to them or they would not have been thus silent, thus terribly silent, for their silence at this juncture was terrible.

They were not entirely silent. Mr Dillon made an impassioned oration on behalf of dead Volunteers, conceiving possibly that on order made in Council these men would rise from the dead; and the day before Roger Casement's death he opposed England valiantly on a question of astronomy. Doubtless when he remembers Roger Casement he will speak about him also, and will demand his resurrection. I forget what Mr Redmond did, but perhaps he did not do anything. Mr Swift MacNeill was busy purging the British peerage of undesirable princes, and no Englishman will deny that his work was patriotic and respectable. The others spoke on various subjects, but I do not remember what they were.

In the meantime an Irishman has been hanged for an offence, which, however Englishmen may justly regard it, could find some timid apology from Irishmen, and he was hanged in the silence of the Irish Party, and he was hanged because of the silence of the Irish Party. Some members of this Party signed the petitions for mercy which we have all heard of, but they were not sent to Parliament to sign shy, surreptitious documents. They were elected to represent Ireland, and to speak in the ear of the world the Irish mind. It is hard to foretell the political future. It is hard to imagine to what degradation a nation may sink, but we may say that from their silence in this event the Irish Party have earned the anger and

contempt of their race. Naturally shepherds do not fear the wrath of sheep. Shepherds!

New Ireland
19 August 1916

Conscription and the Return of the Dog

by James Esse

Although English affairs have in general little interest for this country, yet at times the English political movement crosses the Irish political frontier, and in such cases should be carefully watched. One of these cases is military conscription, and we may expect shortly to hear anew on this subject.

It is probable that compulsion, which up to the present has only been applied to men under 41 years of age, will be enlarged to include all men competent to bear arms up to 45 years. This is not politics; but one wing of the party demanding universal compulsion will be composed of politicians and their intention will be against this country. Let no one believe that the 'last ditch' has been filled in, or that the surrender of our blood and our treasure will reconcile the Irreconcilables. Self-government (politically speaking) is further from us to-day than it has been at any period in the last decade, and if we should get it (as I believe we will) it will be on account of causes over which the politicians have not even a shadow of control. These causes may be social, economic, and political revolution, with, in addition, a continental horizon so black that it cannot be disregarded. The English will have to put their house in order and under the dust raised by their brooms we may escape.

But the immediate matter to which our attention must be held is the universal compulsion now foreshadowed. An attempt will

undoubtedly be made to include Ireland in the scope of this measure, and this attempt will constitute the politics already referred to. Some handle must be found, some platform word coined, by which the promise of Self-government may be decently retrieved, and these will be discovered in compulsion and the words 'shirkers' and 'slackers.' Not one of these politicians believes for a moment that Ireland will consent to conscription; they do not even want us to consent. The total of our male humanity would not be appreciable among their vast armies. They want us to refuse, they will force us to refuse, and in our refusal they will find the petard with which they hope to hoist us.

We had once, in the long ago before the war, a national and historical case against the conscription of Irishmen to fight in English battles, a case so weighty with time and history that it was unanswerable, and had it been advanced at the proper time this question could never again have arisen for us. It was not advanced then, the extreme contrary to it was advanced by our politicans, and the Irish Party, with an assurance that would seem like treachery if it did not also seem like madness, threw overboard everything that constituted the Irish case and cause, and left us in the lunatic, the unbelievable situation in which we find ourselves. Very terrible sins must have been committed by Ireland in ages past or we could not at this juncture have been afflicted with our present political representatives. Home Rule was in their hands, it was in their pockets, it was in ours – and they threw it away.

We may well rub our eyes and demand what night is this which darkens around us, for it does not seem credible that what has arrived can actually have happened. Where are the whirling and valiant words which Ireland and America listened to and believed in? They are flown with the leaves of yesteryear, and the ear of man knows them no more. Our leaders have disowned them, and ask, was it truly this tongue which spake that nonsense? They have had a vision, and there, rayed in fire and blazing with light, they discovered – England. Long years ago, so runs the tale, some Pope made a present of Ireland to a King of England, and, for history can repeat itself, to-day Ireland has been handed over as a present to King George the Fifth. The Party is regenerate. It is sorry for all it has done. Its sins of aforetime deject it, and as a dog returns to its vomit so it has returned, and has eaten its words.

New Ireland
23 September 1916

Pamphlets

by James Esse

At this moment it is necessary that the fullest and freest exchange of ideas should be possible between Irishmen concerning the subjects in which they are interested. Such an intercourse and exchange is not easily attainable, for the Press of our country, where it is not under the supervision of the Censor, is in the possession, not of men, but of interests, and, as yet, these interests are hostile to any national policy which would interfere with or modify the pre-war relations between this country and England. That is, the money-interest both here and in England has its own political view, and the entire machinery for the distribution of news, views, criticisms and speculation is in their hands. They own the Press.

Matters being so, we may welcome the fact that an era of pamphleteering has set in, and that a person having anything to say can say it at comparatively small expense and with the certainty of reaching a fair number of those who are interested in the writer's special purpose. Already the pamphlets have come, and, from what one hears, they have been welcomed by large numbers of readers. One remembers the interesting and outspoken pamphlets by 'Coilin' on Pearse and Connolly, and the study by Martin Daly of a number of the men who were executed. There was AE's great pamphlet wherein the political basis of the various Irish parties was charted, and many others, all of them, if not good of their kind, at least honest in their purpose.

Here is another pamphlet, entitled 'Irish National Tradition,' by Mrs Alice Stopford Green. There are few people better fitted to speak on this subject than Mrs Green, and in this pamphlet the stores of a well-stored mind are at the service of her countrymen. The author points out a difference in the tradition of both countries, and where the tradition is politic in England, it is literary in Ireland. It seems strange to say so in a country that reads very little, but our

traditions were for a long time distributed orally, and it is in our poetry and prose, remembered and written in the Irish language, and now in great part available, that one must seek for the facts regarding the domestic history of our nation and the facts regarding the psychology of our race. Much that is set down in this pamphlet tends to establish a real difference between the two peoples, and no Irishman can read it without feeling that he has a country and an inheritance and a future.

We realise all of these things, but, as yet, dimly and uncertainly, nor will they be completely realised until we have gone back to our own language, and in that treasure-chest of the nation we will discover everything that belongs to us, saved for us, guarded for us by the faithful, poor few who preserved all that is Ireland for all that Ireland is to be.

They named our country lovingly, those Irishmen of old, with all kinds of loving names, and they named it, strangely, was it prophetically, as Inis Fail, the Isle of Destiny, and one poet, quoted here, and who wrote a thousand years ago, said, 'God's counsel concerning virgin Eire at every time is greater than can be told.'

New Ireland
25 August 1917

Crêpe de Chine

The thing came on her like a thunderbolt, and indeed while she was submitting to destiny the phrase 'like a bolt from the blue' did detach itself for an instant in her consciousness, but it was fallen upon and buried by the avalanche of emotions and angers and plannings which her mind was trying so vainly to deal with.

She had gone, it was a custom of hers on sunny afternoons, into the Saint Stephen's Green Park and had walked a little, and sat a little, and looked for a while at the flowers and at the ducks swimming, each with a tiny brood bobbing lightly in its wake; and at a seagull that swooped and slanted to touch the water with the tip

of its bill, and then, without a pause, slid widely sideways, and up easily again, and away on adventures never to be recorded.

Her purpose was to go down Grafton Street to a shop, in the window of which, too late for action on the previous evening, she had seen a blouse marked at a price which she believed must be a mistake or a shop trick. She foresaw there would be trouble in the shop when she asked for it at the price marked on the ticket, and that the salespeople would say the blouse was too small for her, and would try to make her take another of the same kind at three times the price. But she meant to give battle, and was determined not to leave the shop without the identical blouse, whether it fitted her or whether it did not.

She was in the Green to prepare herself for this battle, for by gazing on tranquil water we gain something of its tranquility, and the untroubled serenity of flowers and blue skies would give her the serenity of mind which could break even the will of a drapery salesman.

If, she thought, they send me a saleswoman I shall have a hard fight, but if they send me a man I may win without much trouble, for men get tired easily. Also, she thought, men cannot fight well when they know they are in the wrong, but women fight as well for the wrong as for the right. The man will know that the figure marked on the blouse is an advertising trick designed to entice people into the shop, and when I accuse him of that he will give in where a woman would not.

The influence of the peaceful, sunny place had done its work, and feeling braced and tranquil she arose from the iron seat and turned up the alley by the lake towards the Grafton Street exit. When she stood she looked across the pond and noticed that two friends of hers were seated in the shade of a small tree, and the thought came to her that she would tell them of her errand. She might even ask them to accompany her, for in a shop all discussion closes when several voices are raised in protest.

She went across the steep little bridge and bore down on her friends. They did not notice her approach, and she thought smilingly: 'when women so lose themselves in talk they are either talking scandal or dress.' And she halted a moment so that she might not come on them too abruptly. The short, bushy tree was between them, and on this side of the tree also there was a seat.

The instant she halted she heard her own name mentioned, and knew that she was the subject of the scandal, if scandal it was. She

smiled shyly, slipped into the seat on her side of the tree, and listened to the talk of her friends.

In a few seconds she was no longer smiling, and where she had been listening carelessly she now listened with her whole being.

'How did he come to marry her?' said one voice.

'He didn't marry her, my dear,' the other voice replied, 'she married him.'

'She must be at least ten years older than he is.'

'Yes, at least, and I'm sure he knows it by this.'

'Do they get on together, do you think?'

'One never knows, but I would say they do not. They snap a good deal at each other, and even when he does not snap he seems always impatient when she is speaking.'

'Well, she has a strident voice.'

'She never talks, she yells, and he is one of those strung-up people who get shivers when – Do you know what I think?'

'What do you think?'

'I think that some day or other he will run away from her.'

'I don't think he will do that. I don't think he is the kind . . . of man –'

'I do. I think he is exactly the kind of man. If they had children he is the kind of man who would never leave his children: but they have none, and that is the only thing which could hold him to her. Think of the way she yells in a room or in a restaurant, and how quiet he is. Every movement of hers must seem to him like the worst kind of vulgarity. And she is vulgar, look at the way she dresses. She is always a fright. If she has the right skirt she has the wrong boots, and when her blouse is right, her hat is wrong. She hasn't got a particle of taste, the poor thing.'

'She has no taste in dress, that is true, but – '

'She has no taste in anything, and she draws attention to herself always, always. He must hate to be with her.'

'Men don't see these things.'

'Don't they, my dear! Don't they! That type of man notices everything. I've seen him looking at her when he didn't know anyone was looking at him. Oh! I'm no fool, and I tell you this, that I'll bet you anything he'll run away from her.'

'Oh, now, she is not so bad as you say.'

'Not for us, but for him she is worse than anything we could say. He hates her, and if he doesn't run away from her before the year is out I – . I'll never believe in my own judgment again.'

'If only she had a child, the poor thing!'

'She hasn't one, and she'll never have one, you and I know that.'

Listening to them, she grew livid with rage. She rose to her feet, stepped carefully to the grass, and walked away.

These were her friends!

These gabby monsters who kissed her every time they met and kissed her every time they parted! And they were always meeting. She went to tea in their houses; they came to tea in hers. Oh! They would not take tea together again. Never again would either of these women put a foot inside her door. That was one thing gained from it all. She knew her enemies now. She was warned at least. Ah, but she would meet them. She would meet them once more and she would cut them to the bone. Now she knew the run of their tongues, but they did not know hers yet. Her husband did, and they would, too. Her husband! He was to run away from her! Well, she would see about that, too. That man! Man! He was more like a snail than a man. And he was to run away from her! She would like to see him run. Indeed, if there was a run in him she would make him run. And he wasn't pleased with her ways. He looked at her, it seemed, when he thought no one observed him, and looked at her as if he hated her. One of these days he might have cause to hate her. A stuck-up prig that thought no one was to open their lips except himself. And he had to have two clean collars every day. And no one but himself was under any circumstances to go into his study. And no one was to open their mouths while his mouth was open. And he wanted a bedroom all to himself. And he wanted his meals at regular hours. And he wanted to go out whenever he liked and come in at all hours. And he wanted his clothes properly brushed. Well! All those things would be seen to, and he would learn that he wasn't a gay bachelor any longer. She would teach him that he had a wife, and that she had her rights, and that she would have her rights.

As she walked her brain was reeling with rage and spite. She would joyfully have learned that her two friends were dead: that they had been crushed by a tram or that a roof had fallen in on them. Less than that they did not deserve, but for her husband no catastrophe could be enormous enough, no torment sufficiently harrowing: no death or disaster of which she could think would be adequate to that man's perfidy. Man! and away her mind went again denouncing and sneering and threatening.

She forgot all about the blouse which was marked vastly below its proper price in the Grafton Street window; she forgot about her two

friends and what they had said of her under the tree in the Park: she forgot about the street and the people in the street whom she jostled and pushed aside without raising an eye to them: she remembered only that there was someone whom she could make pay for all this: someone who she would make pay, and she was hastening towards him to make him pay.

The evening was advanced, and although the sun was still shining, it was shining with a difference. That limpid clarity of the morning was gone: the strong white glare of afternoon had changed: here was now a dust of gold, the first veil of those innumerable veilings which the evening does not cease to spread until her obscurity is complete, and life is hushed, and all the eyes that were open close in quietness.

Under this tender radiance she walked home and untouched by it, touched only by the lowest passions of her being she reached home.

The maid who opened the door said, in reply to her question, that the master was not in yet: and she remembered that at that hour he always went for a walk. 'He has been out a long time to-day,' said the maid.

She went upstairs and took off her hat.

Reminders of her husband were visible everywhere through the house. Here was one of his waistcoats; there was a cigar case; yonder a pair of his slippers, and the sight of them set her off again. . . . 'And he must have a separate bedroom, and he must have this, and he must have that, and no one else is to have anything. And no one is to say a word until he has finished speaking. And no one is to go into his study. . . .'

She arose and marched resolutely downstairs and into his study. She sat down, looking about the room with a feeling of dislike that was almost hatred even for the room. A sheet of paper was lying on the table, and she drew it idly towards her. It was written upon. She read it. It was a short note saying that he could no longer live with her and giving the address of his solicitors, who would regulate their affairs and make all the necessary arrangements. It said that under no circumstances would he ever return to her.

As she read the blood ebbed at one stroke from her cheeks, and a stroke rushed blindingly back again, and her hand that held the paper began to tremble violently.

Smart Set Magazine
July 1918

Sawdust*

The private bar of a public house is called 'the snug.' It is usually about seven feet long by four feet wide. There is a screened counter there, and through this, as through a grill, orders are called to the barman. In very gorgeous public houses the snug is bigger, in many it is smaller than the measurements given above; but in the house where she went the snug was exactly of this size.

She was known in this public house, and she cared to go only where she was known. It is a difficult thing to make new acquaintances. A new acquaintance is a new habit, and she did not wish to add anything to her possessions. She was not set on keeping all that she had of either acquaintances or habits, but decidedly she did not wish to enlarge them. She avoided trouble not as one shrinks from a task, but as one avoids a shower of rain without caring in earnest whether it be avoided or not. She could whisper confidentially to the barman 'Paddy' or 'Johnny' or 'Malachi,' 'you might get me the same again,' and they would bring it with an easiness of bearing almost as if they were brothers of hers, or cousins. A family feeling had grown about her in this house, and she liked that as she liked the taken-for-granted air of the house.

Once on a time she would not have dared to go into a public house. She would have been ashamed; but she had not wanted to go into them then. Things were quite different then, and the time that had elapsed seemed to have included more hours than one year could hold: it had all the sense of length and dreariness of fifteen long years.

Except when the money lacked, she passed all her evenings in this public house. She would enter with a certain noiseless haste, and get at once into the snug. Sometimes there was another person in it, and she always felt that the other person had no right to be there, and that if she appealed to Paddy or Johnny or Malachi, that occupant,

* Two other stories, 'The Wolf' and 'School-Fellows,' which were printed with 'Sawdust,' may be found in *Etched in Moonlight* (London: Macmillan, 1928).

intruder, would be put out. But such an appeal meant the raising of voices, unpleasantness, strain, and she did not want any of these things. She wanted to be comfortable. No, she did not quite want that; she wished to be quiet, she wished that no notice should be taken of her, and she wished that, when she came into or went out of the shop, no one should remark her or look at her.

When she sat in the snug she could not be seen. There she was sheltered, and need not lift her eyes from the yellow and drab sawdust that covered the floor except when she sipped out of the glass, which she did at about two-minute intervals. When the glass was empty, she would sit staring at the sawdust for about a quarter of an hour; then, if Paddy or Johnny or Malachi peered at her through the screen, she would order 'the same again,' and they would bring it with no more words said.

Five glasses carried her through a fair slice of the night. They were rather expensive, these glasses, and every week or so they became more expensive; but that did not matter. Nothing mattered much except that the hours should be assisted to go by, and they dragged less in the snug than they did in the two rooms at home. Often while she stared at the sawdust on the floor she stared through the floor and away into the two rooms at home. She saw the bed there; it was not made yet, but it is not difficult to make a bed; she would do that when she wanted to get into it. She saw the three chairs, two of them tattered in the back, the third bristling and truculent in the seat. The flat pleated canes in these chairs stuck up and down like yellow wires, but for a long time yet they could be sat upon. She saw the gas-stove, which had accumulated much grease and would accumulate more; and she saw the strip of oil-cloth on the floor. It had cracked in a few places, but it was not good enough to sell, and nothing is ever bad enough to throw away.

She looked at these things through the sawdust, and then she reached mechanically for her glass, sipped it, and put it down again.

The snug-bell tinkled, and Paddy or Johnny or Malachi pulled the wire which released the latch.

A face peered through the door. She knew the face, for it smiled at her. She did not know the name of the face, but it lived in the same house that she did. Then the face came in, and three other faces, similarly known and unknown, and three other rusty bonnets and faded shawls came shyly into the snug. They entered shyly, slyly, silently into the snug as though they were going into church, and were afraid of disturbing the devotions of other people. The last one

to enter put on the latch, and in confidential whispers the newcomers told Paddy or Johnny or Malachi what it was they wanted to drink; or at least one of them named a liquid, and the other three murmured hastily, 'I'll have the same Paddy or Johnny or Malachi.' Then the four women sat down and whispered together with a queer, savage, concentrated eagerness of whispering, leaning close and confidentially toward one another, and nodding their bonnets at one another's murmuring, and when one sipped from her glass, they all sipped and sighed, and nodded their bonnets in unison. They whispered to her, too, and she leaned to them and whispered back again, but what the whispering was about she did not know. Maybe it was all about nothing.

The snug-bell rang a second time, and they stopped whispering.

There was a tiny commotion outside in the shop. Through the little screen she could see that Paddy had ducked under the counter; Johnny had turned his back quickly to the bar, and had plucked from the shelf a well-polished glass, which he polished anew industrially and with an air of detachment not only from the shop, but from the world. Malachi had his mouth screwed up in an elaborately careless and sneering fashion. He moved with a too languid ease to the wire that opened the snug-door, and pulled it.

The door opened and was pulled widely open. A very tall, very dark, lank man stood without. It was a priest.

The women in Dublin know every priest in Dublin by sight, but none of them knew this priest. This must be a stranger, one of those travelling clergymen who conduct a mission for a week or two, and then go away to some other country, and from that place away to far countries, travelling continually so, and talking and preaching to all the people in the world.

The great thin, dark man stared in terribly on the women.

'Come out of that,' he said. 'Get out of this place and go home with you and be decent from this day out.'

The four women leaped from their seats, from their glasses, as though they had been touched by electricity. They mumbled and whispered and ran out, and were gone before the priest could speak again.

But she did not move. At first, and on the instant, her heart had beat a sudden hard thud in her bosom. It was as though her breast had been thudded within by a great hammer; then for an instant her heart ceased to beat at all, and then it went as it always had gone, so that she did not notice it or feel any movement of her body. She also

had stared when the door opened, and at her staring the priest stared.

'Get out of this place, woman, and be off home with you,' he said.

She remembered in a flash the look on Malachi's face as he moved to pull the wire that opened the snug-door, and her mouth screwed itself up in the same fashion, and sneered into the lean, set face that was staring down at her. She reached her hand to her glass, lifted it, sipped quietly, and put it down again. She did not speak or move.

The priest came into the snug. He bent to her.

'Will you get out of this place, woman?'

She did not answer, she did not look at him; but she stretched out her hand again to the glass and sipped at it.

The priest stepped to the door, turned and shouted at her in a terrible voice:

'You'll die roaring,' he said.

Then the door of the snug crashed to, and the whole shop became for the space of three heart-beats as silent as the tomb. Malachi looked through the screen.

'You were right, too,' he said, 'coming round the way they do be coming round, interfering with other people's business. If the people weren't afraid of them, there would be a quick end to that game, so there would be.'

He said more, but after a while he went away from the screen, and she was alone.

She could look again at the sawdust and through it to this and that thing which moved in her mind. She did not think things any more; she looked at things, and the things that she looked at brought her neither contentment nor sorrow. They never ceased coming, these pictures. When one had been examined, it faded away, and another, unsought, uncalled, took its place and went away in its turn. Sometimes they were pictures of the many rooms she had lived in and moved from. Sometimes they were pictures of the people she knew or had known. There went the friend of twenty years ago, and there the one who had played her a bad turn when they were both children. They had a little tight pigtail bobbing against each shoulder, and each pigtail was bound an inch from the end in a red ribbon. She saw clean pinafores and torn ones and dirty ones, and stockings with and without holes – all sorts of things and places and people. Seldom did she see her husband, and she never saw her children. He! The war had killed him far away in foreign, heathen

lands. What was it the officer had written to her? It did not matter. And they? It did not matter, either; they also were dead.

The pictures came and were looked at and went away, and were replaced unceasingly; but they were outside of her, they were underneath the floor, and inside of her there was nothing. Well, there was something; there was silence, and while she looked at the pictures she listened to the silence inside her head. It was a wonderful silence; it fascinated her. It was more interesting, more compelling, than any sound. And at a moment that silence might explode into sound, or it might murmur gently, ever so gently; it might whisper to her while she looked at the pictures and was watching it.

There was such and such a place, and here was such another place: she remembered that kitchen-dresser, and there was the little garden, with the rusty watering-can lying against the wall. And he was dead and they were dead. And there was the yard of the old school, and here was the gate that you passed up when you were going to the chapel, and here was – She saw it coming. All the pictures fled. She looked on her silence, and it was still silent, but it was going to speak. She gathered it and molded it and ventured a hand into that drab darkness, and with her mouth open a little, pursed a little, almost smiling, she prepared to echo what the silence would say. It was holding back, but she drew it and dared it and wooed it, until at last it crashed upon her louder than thunder, yet clearer than the tinkle of a bell. And when it had spoken she echoed it from her pursed lips, screaming it suddenly into the roof of the shop.

'You'll die roaring,' she screamed. 'You'll die roaring.'

She snatched at the latch of the snug, and disappeared from the shop in an instant.

Paddy and Johnny and Malachi, with their blood suddenly frozen and their backs creeping and wrinkling, stared at one another, and then they vaulted the counter, and leaped to the door to look after her. They saw the last they would ever see of her as her shawl swirled round a corner and disappeared. No, not quite the last of her; Malachi saw her once more when something was fished out of the canal, and he helped to identify it as a Mrs So and So who lived in such and such a street, a decent, harmless, poor creature, said Malachi, or perhaps it was Johnny or Paddy.

Century Magazine
September, 1918

The Birthday Party

THE LETTER

For a time she had been stupefied, but now her mind was clear, although it was not working. Nature's anodyne is thoughtlessness, and to those in trouble she says, 'Do not think, my children, be very quiet for a while.'

The thing had been discovered quite simply, and the discoveries we make when we are not looking for them are doubly and trebly disturbing. She had got tired amusing the children, and stole from them for a few minutes' rest. As she stretched luxuriously in the deep chair in the study she noticed that her husband's cigarette-case was on the table at her hand, and the wish came to her to smoke a cigarette. She rarely smoked, for she thought – it was less a thought than one of those trifling oppositions to a companion which we make to preserve our individuality from merging into that of the other habitual being – she thought, or said, that smoking gave one a sore throat; but on this occasion, and because she was weary, and because she thought it might tranquillise her jangled nerves, she did wish to smoke.

She lifted the cigarette-case and opened it.

There were no cigarettes inside, but there was a folded paper which at first glance she took to be a banknote, and the small curiosity which besets many people when money is in sight caused her to draw the paper out of the case that she might see whether it was a one-pound or a five pound note.

It was a letter, and she had to read it twice before she could believe it, and even then she could only believe it by violence.

It was written by a woman who addressed her husband in endearing terms, and spoke to him of matters about which she had no knowledge.

And she had thought that no movement of her husband was unknown to her.

She had settled herself in that security; she had based her tranquillity and the order of her existence upon it, and now all these were shaken and they might topple and disappear at any moment. The security, the tranquillity, the order, were no longer facts, but questions which other people had the power to answer, and in which she had no word except the barren one of protest. The common sequences and conjunctions which are life had been arrested, and in their place something monstrous and which was not life appeared and remained. Is anything sacred if a habit is not? Who destroys a habit bleeds us to death or shocks us to paralysis.

Thoughts such as these were not verbal in her mind; but these implications were contained in her thought, or in her stupidity and astonishment.

She looked again, although she had no need to look, at the signature to the letter; it was the signature of a friend of many years' standing.

That woman – for the woman had become so detached, so distant, as to merit the word 'that' and a pointing, explanatory finger – that woman had been with her not an hour previously, had kissed her, and had gone from the house with a waving hand. She had even left behind, and he was now in the house, her small boy aged six, who, with a few other children, had been invited to the birthday-party of her own son aged ten. As she sat she could hear the voices of the children from below stairs, and could distinguish the thin, sweet pipe of that woman's child; she could hear also the more vibrant tones of her own youngster shouting merrily, and these voices withdrew her from the stupidity which was all nerves to plunge her again into the stupidity which is all astonishment. From this she came into consciousness as at a flash, and found that she was walking the room up and down with no knowledge of how or when she had moved from the chair.

BLIND RAGE

To dullness there succeeds astonishment, and to that comes anger, vivifying, amplifying, flushing the veins with fire and filling the mind with words as with thunder. She thought one mortal spasm of hate, wordless, formless, towards the woman, and one other towards

her husband, and again her mind rushed like a dark beam to tear and annihilate the child below-stairs playing with her infant, for she transformed her ten-year-old boy into an infant, and her mind stung again, wrung again, leapt to protect him from a danger which it postulated, but did not explain.

We have, as well as the mind which we use in everyday purposes, an automatic mind which works beyond our control and has a guidance we cannot detect; the body is aware of it distantly, precisely as a person is aware of a message which he hears on a telephone, but the body answers to the mind instantly, as a horse winces instantly to the touch of a spur. So her unconscious hands were shaking and gripping as though they held and shook an enemy, and the muscles of her face writhed in sympathy with the movements in her brain.

Anger ceases as suddenly as it began, for the brain cannot long endure violence; it must rest or madness comes. Yet the mind will not go blank except after a shock, and we must create a bed for it to lie on in the meantime. She made a bed of her son and projected herself into him with a violence of love equal to the passion of hate which she had just quitted. Change is rest either for the body or mind, and it can for a time refresh either body or mind almost as much as sleep will. She looked at her son with a mental vision which transfigured him from a piece of human life into a rarity and a miraculous perfection.

With this mental gaze she caressed his hair, his delicious line of cheek, his fresh young lips and his slender, tender neck; that delicacy could be hurt so easily; that lack of bulk had no protection, except her, except her always; she threw cherishing arms around him, and draped about and over him wings of protection; and with the idea of protection, the idea of an enemy was invoked, and her mind swung in the logical return to the logical extreme so easily, so quickly, that the movement seemed but one turn of a wing across the gulf.

How she would meet that woman when she came to bring home her child! She did not search for the words she would say; she would find the words; they would be infallibly ready when the time came; the words that should ring and echo in those ears until the day she died.

How smilingly she would come; how unprepared, with what careless, outstretched hands; with what cheerful bustle and cor-

diality of life and eye – and how she would freeze that smile, and make those hands fall as though they were cased in lead, and still the cheerful bustle, and strike coldness into that woman's heart, and see the lips tremble, and send terror, born at a stroke, into her eyes; terror and humility and shame.

With reluctance she swung from the theme, but the excitement was too great and she could not remain in those mounting and heady airs; again she turned to the image of her child, flying there as to a sanctuary of love and trust. And there the trust warned her of treachery, and whirled her back again to the husband who had promised and not performed; who had lulled her in order that he might deceive her; who was nice to her so that she might not suspect him; who kissed her in atrocious alternation; he could sit beside her and talk quietly of political nonsense, and a hundred other nonsenses and futilities; he could look at her and let nothing appear in his face or in his eyes, or in a halt or inflection of the voice, or appear in any way. He was a monster; he was a traitor; he was an obscene thing, a rust on the day, a blot on life, he was not fit to live, or he was not fit to be lived with; it was ended, all was ended, let the sun fall and let all that can be shaken shake and fall and be smashed and done with; he would come home; he would be met; he –

Woe, and a woeful delight were in the prospect as she whirled from it, seeking all that was left to her, the one thing that was her own, that which owed her all and owed her nothing. She sought for her son's voice, and heard it, and her heart moved within her like a wing of ecstasy.

With it, there came another sound; the devilish, ear-splitting bark of a fire-arm; and then there came a scream, and ten screams, and then an endless screaming.

She was at the bottom of the stairs before she knew that she had moved, and went flying into that deafness of shrieks where her son was. The maid whom she had left with the children had backed into a corner; she stood against the wall, a figure in a white apron, an open mouth that screamed; about her, gripping her, their faces hidden into her skirt, were three children, a tangle of hair and pretty frocks that screamed. Standing away, near the other end of the room, was her son, his eyes staring in terror, and on the floor two paces from him lay a little, crumpled figure.

'He did it,' the maid jabbered. 'He pointed the thing although I told him not to; he found it in the desk.'

She knelt beside the little figure; she caught his hand and let it fall again; she gripped her own hands together.

'My God!' she cried. 'What shall I say to his mother?'

Novel Magazine
December 1918

Dublin
A City of Wonderful Dreams
Silent and Voluble Folk

When we are asked to resume a man or a city or a philosophy in a couple of phrases our vanity is gratified at the idea that we are considered capable of such a feat, and we are thus enabled to discover in an instant a formula which will survive at least an instant. There is scarcely anything so interesting as these generalizations, and scarcely anything so untrue, for they contain inevitably a disparagement, and are based on the sound assumption that our friends do not care to hear anything praised except themselves.

But there are some things so large, or so important that there is nothing to be said about them at all. Thus 'London is the largest city in the world,' or 'New York has sky-scrapers' is the limit of information which the traveller is willing to advance about these monsters; but Paris or Edinburgh or Seville are small enough to be comprehended, and large enough to talk about. Some one has said that there are but two things to be seen in Dublin – the Phoenix Park and Mr George Russell. It is a hard saying, and it is true only in this, that Dublin is less an aggregation of buildings than a collection of personages.

DUBLIN IDENTIFIED

After all, the statement that is to be made of any city can be made of any other which is of equal antiquity. To the unsympathetic

traveller of an elder day Dublin was not so much a city as a smell. When he saw the word Dublin he remembered the River Liffey and red herrings. But the man who wishes to recall pre-war Paris can sniff similarly backwards, and his unerring nose will twitch to the smell of taxicabs and coffee, while London may be identified by him in an odour of cloth and buns.

Time flies and Dublin can no longer be looked at by the nose. A main drainage system has exorcised the Liffey, and the red-herring basket is as scarce as that of the cockle-seller of old, a legend now, or the more distant hokey-pokey-a-penny-a-lump man, who is not even believed in by children. It is by the eye that Dublin must now be seen. Mr George Moore, to whom our city is dearer than he knows, once said that Dublin is a city of small green parks, set in wide red squares and both enclosed in a grey silence, and he quoted with approval the line of some poet about some place. 'A rose-red city half as old as time.' It is for those green parks, those red squares, and that silence that Dublin is notable; but it is because of her inhabitants that she is unique.

SOME CHARACTERS YOU MEET

Where but in Dublin will you meet the author of a ballad in a thousand limericks, each verse of which is better than the last by the sheer merit of being worse: or the scholar who could have been a saint but that he preferred to be a wit, and is jeopardizing even that by a lust for the concertina: or the dramatist who marches thinly, the very wraith and apparition of himself solid only by his boots? There is the distinguished nobleman who looks like the Wild Man from Borneo, and the other distinguished gentleman who looks like a pair of spats. Mr Yeats will pass like something that has just been dreamed into existence by himself, and for which he has not yet found the precisely fantastic adjective. 'A.E.' will jog along, confiding either a joke or a poem into his own beard, the sole person in the street who is not aware that he is famous. You will sometimes see Mr Bernard Shaw, hurrying as though to explode himself into the bath he has just been exploded out of. There is always a distinguished stranger to be seen. You may discover Mr Chesterton rolling by like a towsled cab, and he in an agony of concentration as of one who is thinking of a loose tooth or a lost pun, or Mr Bennett marching sturdily like a note of interrogation set in a halo of

asterisks. Young New Age men look at Dublin as if they were examining a mule, which they intend to describe as an ass, and the *New Statesman* sees us without believing. In other cities bores are tolerated, but in Dublin they are encouraged, they are collected, and, like the fool who, if he persisted in his folly, would become wise, so the Dublin bore by sheer persistance has become not only beloved but quotable. Fear prevents one from naming them, and the terror that they might blush to know their fame restrains one also.

AN APPREHENSIVE RETURN

Returning to Dublin after a long absence in larger capitals one is haunted by the apprehension that for the old city any comparison will be odious; a fear akin to the idea of finding out something about one's mother afflicts one. The solitary, concentrated passenger on the rockety steamer is not really chewing his moustache; he is ruminating the memory of the capital which he has not seen for a couple of years, and wondering will it be as bad as some one has said, or will it be worse, and he hopes if it is to be bad that it will be worse. For the emigrant returns with a greater curiosity about his own city than he gives to any other capital he drifts into and out of. There he is rooted, not only in the superficial sense of family, but the large phases of history are about him, and the tugs of a whole race are at his heart. Man is not your brother or your enemy or anything else in a foreign land; he is scarcely human, but he is all those and all else when you get home again.

Coming back one discovers that London is noisy, tumultuous, unneighbourly; and that Paris is tawdry and pretentious. That the great cities are over-feminized, over-dressed, shrill, gesticulating, and vulgar; they exist only for purposes of pleasure, and are organized, as a theatre is, for publicity; and the revenge of publicity is to make everything look like everything else, as the revenge of pleasure is boredom.

Driving from the station you look eagerly down the first Dublin street, and discover with a shock that it is empty. There is nobody in it but yourself. You turn a corner and the next street is as empty as the first. You wonder how 300 000 inhabitants can be invisible, and you begin to realize the city that exists in a trance and will not awaken until the coming of the Merchant's Son. The city has gone underground as the fairies did in the old stories, and it will not

reappear until there are no more bayonets in her streets, and nothing more to be frightened of.

VANISHING HORSES

Once, before the electric trams came, Dublin seemed a noisy city; a city of cobblestones and of mighty horses that clashed sparks out of the same cobbles. Carriage horses, dray horses, outside-car horses (the foreigner calls them 'side-cars,' but the inhabitant would be ashamed of himself if he referred to them otherwise than as 'outside-cars'). The city neighed in those days; it snorted and whinnied; it champed on its bit; it jingled brazen harness; it tossed its nose-bag in the air to shake the last oat from the southernest recess of the bag; about its ears were birds innumerable; birds popped and hopped under its legs, winning the easiest existence that fate has vouchsafed to feathers. There were jehus in charge of the gorgeous monsters and they were marvellous as their own horses; purple-chapped, spiky-jowled, wide-smiled, hard-eyed, imperturbable ancients; caparisoned, not clothed, in frieze many-caped coats, balancing hard shiny hats on one side of their heads and with huge hairy chilblainy hands. They chewed tobacco, their mouths were all to one side and they had great yellow teeth, two of which wobbled. A nose-red city half as old as time. In the fanlight over every door there were small plaster horses with one leg up, with both ears cocked, with interrogative manes. The city was on tiptoe, it was alert, vivid, it was a sparkling eye, it was a hoof! But conversation languished under the menace of those thudding, deeply-whiskered fetlocks. Dublin was a silence in a tempest, as it is now a solitude in a multitude.

THE CONQUERING TRAM

The electric trams came and a new era: that Dublin is as remote as the Stone Age. The horses disappeared, the birds are searching vainly elsewhere for a like city of nose-bags, a city of dream. Only here and there will you now see a plaster horse in a fanlight; and Dublin, silent under the dashing of those hoofs, has not yet recovered from the silence they had forced upon it. The streets then were thronged, men and women went out then to look at the horses,

to drown themselves in the uproar and menace of the horses, and to this day the Dublin people do not speak in the streets, but they talk much in private and are the most voluble race of silent people that the world has ever known.

Professor Macallister considers that the prehistoric Irish totem was a horse, and perhaps Dublin is yet mourning her vanished steeds, for to this day her people do not use the streets for any social purpose except funerals.

It is a haunted city also. The ear of a stranger, halted at midnight in those deserted ways, will catch a sound driving towards him which never comes near; he will hear a rumble which will not materialize. He will stand, waiting for the vehicle that will never come. It will be long ere he realizes, as all Dublin people do, that at midnight the ghosts of long-dead horse-trams revisit the phases of the moon. If a finger should touch his eye he would see again a spanking shay and hear once more the thunder of the hoofs. The stranger steals to his hotel with his overcoat padded protectively about him and his umbrella at the ready. He is glad to get back to London where the streets are full, and away from empty Dublin where the streets are too full.

SEA AND HILL AND SKY

The mountains are near in Dublin, the sea is next door, and the clouds hang so low that they must be reckoned with the town; pre-war clouds they are, and the colours last and are for ever delightful. In this street when the eye scans forward it lights, and with what joy, on the eternal hills; from this window you may smell backwards to the ocean, and out of this one you may clutch a fistful of cloud and put it in your pocket. Sea and hill and sky – that is Dublin; and a silence, compacted of their essence, is Dublin also. For if perfection is possible in this world, Dublin should be the perfect city; the model, the unique civic and architectural achievement of man. Nature herself has lent every aid she possesses to that end, and if even she is thwarted what a notable cause there must be! An effect is often difficult to determine, but a cause never: so the woes of any man can be traced back to two sources – the thing he has and the thing he hasn't; and it is so with a city, and it is so with Dublin. There are two things she has which she doesn't want, and two things she wants which she hasn't got. If some benevolent insurrection

could but rid Dublin of her tramway system and her Paving Committee what a future would open before her! Neither of these things fit her streets, and, after its inhabitants, what is a city but its streets? And if, in lieu of these, she could but procure a Parliament and a 'bus system, then Dublin would come from underground; she would blossom like the rose, and all the other cities would recognize their queen.

The Times
4 November 1919

Mythology
Quaint Tales of Origination
The Cult of Death

Mythology is concerned with the birth and death of man, and in general, for we reason backwards more easily than we do forwards, it is an endeavour to explain how man came on the planet, or on some particular part of it. The conclusion arrived at by all mythologies has a unity which is disturbed only by such differences as may be explained by geographical or climactic conditions. Naturally, each generation considers that it is wiser than the one which preceded it, and it is the effort of every generation to rationalize the knowledge bequeathed by its predecessor. In other words, it is the constant endeavour of the rationalizing mind to refer all that it is told of to something it already knows, and so we have solar, lunar, agricultural, and water myths to choose from, with the Œdipus Complex as a good modern addition, and every man may find his own hat on every other man's head, or his own bee in any other man's bonnet. Yet in the visible world all that is to be seen may not be visible.

Irish mythology is still to a great extent matter for the philologist rather than the poet. But the rationalizing mind, working on philological findings, is apt to conceive the quotation 'In the

beginning was the Word' too verbally, and its tendency is to consider Being itself as philological in its structure. However unreasonable it may seem, it would yet be an interesting experiment to postulate an Unknown rather than a Known, and in the consideration of this subject such a course might be in accord with the Irish genius which fashioned the Irish myth. The postulate underlying Irish history is that of every other race which possesses a mythology – the Irish people claim to be descended from the gods.

Like every other country, Ireland has been overrun by successive invasions. The newcomers brought their own religious experience with them, and would impose on the conquered people not only a political mastery, but in time a cultural one as well. Less than that is not conquest. The new gods would at last be universally accepted, and the older ones, living only in the folk memory, would become the demons of a new race. Flinders Petrie estimated that a complete racial transfusion or transformation would take place in about 600 years, and that after such a term of occupation and intermarriage a new race and a new culture would be in being. Perhaps a thousand years would see such a result, for the folk memory is tenacious.

From the earliest historic time the rationalizing process had been at work in Ireland, and vast tracts of our history and story show the effort that was made to Christianize the older legends. Thus the march of the Táin took place two years before the birth of the Saviour, and Conchubar mac Nessa's death synchronizes with His death. So the whole vast epic, although it stubbornly rejected the Christianizing influence, was brought into the Christian era, and by the exemplary death of Conchubar a *post mortem* benediction was extended to the great tale. But if we have something to deplore in the clerical manipulation of our tales we have also much to be thankful for, because, generally speaking, the Church became the custodian of our legends, and treated them tenderly. It was inevitable that all which had to do with the older religious system would be suppressed; the censor there would be and was deadly; scarcely more than a whisper reaches us of the Druids, and we are permitted, not quite silently, to conceive that their cult was demoniacal.

SYMPATHY OF THE CHURCH

It is one of the curious facts in those tales which do not show extensive interference that the personages concerned will not

mention their god by his name. One of the commonest affirmations in an Irish story is 'By the god of my people,' 'I swear by the gods my people worship,' and it would seem that there was a taboo (the Irish equivalent is *geasa*) in the utterance of the name of a deity. In many countries the utterance of a name is regarded almost as a magical act: it is a possible invocation, and in ancient Ireland this would appear to have been the case.

There is, however, a notable exception in the historic censorship. A vast amount of information has come to us concerning the race known as the Tribes of the goddess Dana (the Tuatha De Danann), the people of the three gods, the Shi folk, the fairies. The folk memory held these tales so tenaciously that they could not be destroyed, and perhaps a priesthood recruited in its entirety from the folk would not strive too definitely to uproot beliefs which they themselves may have more than three-quarters believed in. The bards and the great bardic schools would also have retarded any such suppression.

It is very curious the more than benevolence, the real tenderness, which the Church has extended to the fairies and the fairy legend in Ireland. It would seem that a cultural campaign cannot be absolutely perfected unless it is accompanied by a military one: but the Church in Ireland was not and has never been militant; it was not and has never been tyrannical; it was and is, perhaps, the cleanest Church in the world, and it is the only human decency which the later historic period has vouchsafed to Ireland. But the fairies as they are told of in the older tales do not coincide in any way with the fairies as they are spoken of to-day, and the conclusion may be arrived at that there are no real fairytales in any European language, and there will not be until Irish fairylore has been reconstructed.

Behind the people of Dana, there loom the gigantic wraiths of dead and forgotten deities, a whole indecipherable mosaic of name and function losing and finding themselves in a tangle of marriage and death and reappearance. It is not easy to believe that the daring speculation, the vast generalizations contained in myth have been forged by barbarously ignorant people: they may be current among ignorant people, but, if so, these latter are the degenerate descendants of greatly cultivated races whose wisdom died with them, or of which wisdom nothing is left but the rags and tatters.

EARLY ORIGINS

The story of prehistoric Ireland is told in some very curious manuscripts. One version is, that the Isle of Fair Women was discovered by three fishermen – Fomorians. These three went to bring their wives to the new fertile land they had found, but they were overwhelmed and perished in a flood at Tuath Inba. Another has it that Banba (an ancient name for Ireland), with two other daughters of Cain, came to Ireland with 50 women and three men, one of whom was Finntain, Banba's husband. As the ship approached land a storm arose, the vessel was wrecked, and, with the exception of Finntain, all of that company were drowned. Finntain survived to a prodigious age and was able to narrate his history to St Patrick. Another story tells how Partholan, the grandson of Noah, came to Ireland. His vessel also was wrecked and most of his company perished. Some, however, succeded in landing, and from these a race was propagated. (It is curious that this race is referred to as 'Mindless' or 'Foolish.') A plague came and with the exception of Tuan mac Cairill, all of these beings perished. Tuan did not die, but he suffered various animal transformations until, as a man again, he was able to tell the story of Ireland to Saint Finian the Abbot of Moville.

In other versions the Fomorians are regarded as the first people in Ireland. It is curious that in all these stories the sea and drowning by sea are insisted on. This memory of a flood may or may not be entirely attributable to Biblical narrative. The Fomorians also came from the sea, and in later times the word came to have the significance of pirates. The people of Partholan came next, but this race died completely. The invasion by Nemed, son of Agnoman, followed, and after many battles with the Fomor the Nemedians left Ireland. Some of them went to Scotland, and this emigration might be named later the Picts. Some of them went to Greece, and others went to the North of the World. After many years the Grecian Nemedians returned to Ireland as the Firbolgs, the Fir Domnan, and the Galiuin. This branch of the ancient Nemedians then worshipped the Fomorians as their gods. The Nemedians who went to the North of the World remained away for a much longer period, 'studying magic.' When they returned to Ireland they came as the Tuatha De Danaan – i.e., the Tribes of the Goddess Dana; the masters of magic and knowledge. But other accounts say that the people of Dana came from heaven. These are the gods, and in the

story of their combats and adventures lie the prime mythological facts of Ireland.

THE COMING OF MAN

The history of man in Ireland commences properly with the coming of the Sons of Mil. It is suggested, however, that the Milesians were at least of semi-divine origin, for they were able to fight and defeat the men of Dana, although the great wizards conjured against them Malignant Sprites, Spectres, and great Queens: beings to be equated perhaps with Elementals. After their defeat in the two battles of Moy Turad the Tribes of the Goddess Dana retired to an underground world, and although their subsequent appearances were frequent, they did not again question the sovereignty of man, and their attitude was, on the whole, benevolent towards the new race.

It is said that the first-comers, the Fomorians, were incomplete beings. The word is sometimes translated giants. They are represented as one-legged, one-armed, one-eyed, goat-headed. The second race, Partholan's, were complete bodily, but were incomplete mentally; they were mindless, but it was not until the Tuatha De Danaan came that Being was perfected in its bodily and mental functions, and that a form was created suited to the needs of man. The coming of the Fomorians might then typify the primal, erratic, evolution of form; the invasion of Partholan would show the completion of that evolutionary phase; while the coming of the Tuatha De Danaan might describe the descent of knowledge of the spirit. The battles between Not-Form (the Fomorians) and Mind (the de Danaans) were incessant, full of varying victories, compromises, and vicissitudes, and it was with the utmost difficulty that the people of Dana finally triumphed over their gigantic and almost unmalleable opponents. They killed the one-eyed king, Balor.

I do not think this aspect of the myth has been explored, possibly because the minds of the codifiers have been dominated by the intellectual eminence of Greece, and every attempt is made to equate all myth to the classical standard. But Greek myth has been subjected to an intensive moral, philosophic, and poetic rationalization, and may not be the most trustworthy of sources. It is to India, I think, the Irish mythologist should turn, seeking his parallels and sources, and he is likely to do it more fruitfully there than in any other land.

There is matter for curious meditation in the legend of the Nemedians (Sacred People), part of whom fled from the Fomorians to Greece and returned as slaves, Firbolgs, or Bag Men, and were again subjected to the Fomor: a futile or spoiled evolution, in fact: and that other part who went to the Northern World, regarded by some as the first habitable part of the globe and the cradle of life, and who returned at last as the Tuatha De Danaan, the masters of knowledge, the gods and predecessors of man. It may be on lines similar to this that the great Irish myth will at last reveal its secret.

THE MORTAL GODS

There is almost no end to the tales told of the Tuatha De. They are the children of Dana, the mother of the gods, and she is the daughter of the Dagda, the wise, shrewd, or good god: who again is the son of Olatair, the All Father. There is not much information about Dana except that she had three sons (the Plough, the Hazel, and the Sun), and her people are sometimes called the Children of the Three Gods. (A triune cult was extensive in Ireland long before St Patrick added the shamrock to it.) But there is a vast legend of the Dagda. It seems to be implicit in the myth that these gods are subject to mortality; the Dagda, is supplanted by Angus Óg, as he had supplanted Lug, the supplanter of Nuadat; they die or disappear or are perhaps translated.

It is possible to read into the legends hints of other worlds than this one. These worlds are spoken of under many names, but they may be reduced to a tentative order: There is the Earth; the Shí; the Many-Coloured Land; the Land of Wonders; and the Land of Promise; and although these names, as their meanings became obscured, are constantly interchanged or misapplied, it is yet possible to regard them as separate planes of consciousness or being. The Shí, the realm of the Tuatha De, is an underground world; its god is the Dagda or Angus Óg, and its approach is by clay. It is more beautiful, but its structure, both political and visual, coincides with that of Ireland. There are, as in Ireland, five Provinces in the Shí governed by four Provincial Kings and a High King. Sex and the sexual facts correspond with those of earth, and Desire, unrestricted by matter, is its machinery. It might be spoken of as a world of sensuous dream: the Land of Heart's Desire. 'When we think the

fields are sown they are sown,' said one; 'When we think the fields are reaped they are reaped.'

The approach to the Many-Coloured Land is by water, and its lord is the Ocean god Manannan, the son of Lir. This land has not been elaborately charted, but its structure does not seem to be continental. Islands are continually referred to, and each island has a king and queen. One is tempted to infer that these blissful couples exist in absolute isolation, as their 'islands' do, and that isolation may be the peculiar note of this world; for there is often no reference to servants or retinue; and domestic acts are performed by wishing or willing them to be performed. There seems to be a sexual contemplation, but not sexual act, and from this chaste brooding on beauty children are born to 'Sinless Parents.' Unlike the Shí, a carnal inconstancy is here punished with terrible rigour – destruction by fire, or banishment back to earth, as in that curious and suggestive tale, 'Art the Son of Conn,' translated by Mr R. I. Best.

A CYCLE OF RE-BIRTH

It would seem from this tale that the lord of the Many-Coloured Land, Manannan, is, by a descending influence, God of the Shí, for he sends a command to Angus Og, and it may follow, by a similar declension, that Angus Og, lord of the Shí, is the God and ruler of this earth.

Visits between the earth and the Shí are so numerous as to be almost normal in the old tales. There was scarcely a member of the Fianna-Finn who had not a wife, a mother, or a sweetheart among the Shí, and the converse may be expected. Intercourse with the succeeding world, the Many-Coloured Land, is not, however, frequent, and it is generally compassed only by the High King of Ireland or by some member of his family. The High King of Ireland was usually the Chief Magician of Ireland also. It is probable that in the tales wherein the Ocean god appears as a comic character, the name Dagda should be read instead of Manannan, and it is likely that there is very little or no real lore pertaining to this twice-removed deity.

The approach to the next world, the Land of Wonders, is by fire. As the earth is diminished to islands in the sphere preceding it, so earth might be entirely dissipated in the Land of Wonders and a

new element may environ being. And as the sexual fact had shrunk to a mere contemplation in the previous sphere, so male and female may be undifferentiated in this one. No Irish hero or monarch claims to have undertaken this journey, and no information is available concerning it.

The fourth world, the Land of Promise, is utterly unknown. It may be equated with the realm of Absolute Deity, Unity in Deity, or Nirvana.

In parochial terms many races are referred to in Ireland: Fir bolgs, Fir Domnan, Galiuin, Milesians, but in a larger utterance there are but two races – the gods and the not-gods. The not-gods are men, the gods are dead men. A cult of death, rather merry than otherwise, is one of the outstanding facts in Irish ritual, and may be regarded as the very base of the mythology. Night is the parent of day; Winter produces and nourishes the Summer. Death is the ruler of Life. The divinities of the Shí are divinities of the dead, because they are the dead; and, for the theory of re-birth is accepted in the tales, man goes to the Shí after death, dies there into the Many-Coloured Land, and so through successive phases of eclipsed being until the time comes when, in the enormous adventure of living, he may be carnate again in clay.

The Times
4 November 1919

The Thieves

Two pairs of silk stockings had been stolen, and the mistress was not the one to let such a thing go easily by.

They had not been collected at one fell, criminal swoop, for she had noted and discussed the absence of one pair at least a fortnight before the companion pair disappeared. She was, however, an able lady and one from whom silk stockings could not be stolen with impunity.

She gave each of the four servants a special afternoon off as a reward, so she informed them, for their good service, their obedience and tidiness. Then having guarded her exits and

retirements by a suddenly applied pressure of work on the remaining girls, she went carefully through the boxes of the servant who was enjoying the afternoon airs of freedom.

By these methodical tactics she came into the re-possession of her missing property.

She made other discoveries while searching through the boxes of her servants, and when the search was completed she had quite a new psychological appreciation of them all, as servants, as human beings, and as members of society. Thoroughness has as much the aspect of a virtue as even cleanliness has, so she read the personal letters which were under her hand, and gathered from them much that astonished her, and much that caused her to believe the end of the world was imminent.

'These ridiculous people!' she murmured, and she went on to the next letter. Naturally on reviewing these matters the decision she arrived at was, that at intervals which would not prejudice the efficient working of her establishment she would discharge all her domestics. She decided also that she would scrutinize the belongings, and in particular the letters of every person to be employed by her in the future. Of course she would have to employ these people before she could read their letters, but it was worth it in order to do that, and for the first time she reviewed the accustomed unending succession of servants with something of complacency.

She would certainly read their letters, for it was illuminating work and it was interesting; but, in the light of these revelations, it was more and much more than that, it was a duty which every right-minded person owed to her home and to the community in which she moved.

Indeed some of the letters which she discovered she bore away within her blouse as keepsakes – no, as evidence; she would produce them later on when the domestic person concerned had become the culprit which all servants do inevitably become.

But these reflections would have time to grow fruitful later on; her immediate concern was to deal righteously with the person who had stolen not only her stockings but her silk stockings; and that person, pale, flustered, vehement, vague, and tearful, was standing before her. A few paces away stood the housemaid, the indispensable witness whom she had called upon when she had made the discovery, and had bidden to note and be prepared to swear that thus and thus only had the stockings been found, and in this place, a servant's box to wit, had they been concealed. Another girl had

been despatched, but without the criminal being aware of it, to fetch a constable, and she was due to return with a constable in the fewest of minutes.

'You know,' said the mistress in a voice wherein sadness and admonition had blended, and were terrible, 'You know that this is a theft; one must, one simply must be protected against robbers, and you stole my silk stockings! What did you want with them? Why did you steal them? Who are you to want to wear silk stockings? What kind of bringing up did you get? What kind of school did you go to? Did they not teach you any religion there? Did they not – ?'

The constable, helmeted, buttoned, truncheoned, whiskered, a sour-faced being, a bleak, gaunt, bone and hieroglyph of that which cannot be eluded or opposed, arrived; and he came almost too soon for one who had many things which required not only to be said, but to be reiterated; and in a tempest of tears and entreaties the girl was taken away, screaming, until the door closed behind her, that she wanted to be taken in a cab.

She was a majestic woman; her eyes demanded your homage; her nose commanded it. She had the air of authority which comes only to one who can pay for it and she carried the graces of rectitude with an air which is legitimate only in an employer.

Nevertheless she had failings. She did not admit them, perhaps she did not know of them, and perhaps, therefore, she had not got them; she called them by a different name, and so they were not the same thing as that indicated by people who use another word.

When, for example, she took a thing she only took it, but when another person took a thing that other person stole it.

The distinction is real enough, and her attitude was justified, for laws are not framed against the wealthy but against the necessitous class, and that which is acquisition in the one becomes, by polarity, depravity in the other. Most wealthy people are acquisitive; they would not be wealthy if they were not; all necessitous people are acquisitive; they would not be human if they were not; but the premise in each case is different; and the ergo takes its careless, logical road.

She was as acquisitive as a magpie, and as indiscriminate in the selection of her booty as that pleasant bird is in the satisfaction of his wide and varied desires. Are all rich people selfish? It is an impossible postulate, for one may forge a generalization which will be true of a class, but which will be untrue if applied to the individuals of that class. But too often in their dealing with the other

class the rich display a shrewd unnecessary meanness which takes some of the gilt off their gold, brings wealth under contempt, destroys the sanctity of property, and is the worst possible kind of bad business.

She, as the saying goes, would lift the cross off an ass's back, but she would not rob anything, for she was wealthy enough to have no necessity, no reason, to be a criminal and so was not a criminal.

Her just, strict, able dealing with the peccant maid-servant pleased her for days, and the memory of that swift retribution was a comfort to her every time she saw or talked to another servant.

She learned from her cook that a draper near by with whom she sometimes dealt, was, in a distant way, a kind of relative, a kind of several-times-removed connection of the girl who was now purging her sins in duress.

A respectable man, she said, and was warmed to find herself thus generously candid towards one who after all was attached to sinister people. She hoped he was properly ashamed of his eccentric relationship, and, remembering his occupation and his face, she felt quite certian that he was adequately and respectably ashamed.

She fashioned reasons to visit his shop, and on several occasions she interviewed its head.

A sandy head, very quiet, very attentive, most obliging, very – the description halted a moment – but found means to continue, although at a tangent – one of these heads which take on a queer shape of its occupation, and as grooms evolve or have imposed on them a horsey look and bearing, so he had acquired a shoppish expression, a shoppish gait. Passing him in the street you suddenly murmured: 'That' – not knowing he was that – 'that reminds me that I wanted to buy – ' whatever it was that you wanted to buy. And in the criss-crossing of your 'thats' the trail became blurred which might have indicated that he was the stimulus to your memory.

She almost expected, she certainly hoped that he would mention and apologize for his disreputable relation however many-times-removed, but as he did not do so she mentioned the fact herself.

But this draper was a shopman and no more; he would drape her and drape for her, but he would not converse with her except about the weather; so, when she opened a subject which was neither draperies nor weathers, he bowed before her and said 'Ah!' and washed his hands at her in the shop manner, and produced as if from his sleeve a new and interesting 'line' in blouses for her approval.

She dismissed him from her mind and left him thereafter to the peace of the little wooden office on the right-hand middle of the shop, and to the company of a brisk girl who snapped in the silver of the clients and rapped out the copper of the shop with unwearying vigilance and promptitude.

She might have marvelled at these people, were it not that to do so would be to distinguish them, and by extension to acknowledge them, and thus, on a larger remove, to break up the mould of society.

These thoughts were quite apparent to her, not indeed as words or verbal statements, for she thought as it were in the lump, which is the way most people think, and we do not need the elucidation of words until we have become suspicious of our thoughts, and must take them to pieces to examine their machinery.

Meanwhile there was a kind of satisfaction, a piquancy, in frequenting the premises of a man a member of whose family has been in your service, has pilfered your house and is veritably in jail at your instance. The satisfaction was made up in good part by the glow which comes from the successful forgiveness of sins; she was not withholding her custom; nor was she visiting the sins of the children upon the fathers; and if there was a spice of malice in the thought of entering the premises of the man who was invisibly linked to her by a petty larceny, it was still a small thing by the side of her forbearance and generosity.

She came often to the shop. Indeed for a time she transferred most of her custom to this shop, and the brisk girl who sat with the draper at the receipt of custom raked in her coins of silver, rattled out her change in weighty copper metal, and bade her good-day and good-bye in a voice which had taken on something of the clash or chime of the precious metals which rang and rang again under her agile fingers.

About this wooden hutch at the right-hand middle of the shop there was always an air of bustle without confusion. Ordered activity reigned here; the whole shop flowed to this point and ebbed from it; and here the shopman in a dilemma went hastily for instructions and returned with an instant healing advice which pacified the customer and restored to his own lips the smile which the dilemma had chased from them.

One day she came into the shop and, as was her custom, went on a tour of inspection. Various shop-people produced for her approval a special 'line' in this or that department, or something quite new

which the firm had discovered and commanded and recommended. She was interested by the articles produced, but her interest was in nearly every case intellectual and not personal. Not a silver coin of hers went to the till.

There were a good many people in the shop, and there was an active movement about the central wooden office.

One of the shopmen went suddenly and swiftly to this office and in a low voice he delivered himself of his woe. He received a command which caused him to snatch quickly at a hat and precipitate himself into the street.

In about half a minute he returned and he was accompanied by a policeman.

When this latter personage stepped into the shop there entered with or there was simultaneously released into the shop a certain stir and tension. People looked at the policeman, then they looked at each other, then they looked at the ceiling, for who has ever seen a policeman in a shop? The hands of the salesmen ceased for a tense moment to wash themselves, and their facile words hung and ended on the air; the draper himself trotted his grey face and sandy head from the office and advanced to meet the law. . . .

Mercy! They were coming towards her! They were looking at her.

The policeman was looking at her; a large brown glitter of a look composed of eyes and buttons. The draper was looking at her, a small, grey, blinking, defined, and spectacled kind of look; other people, a speckle and wobble of small points, were looking at her. The draper lifted his closed hand and pointed one atrocious finger at her; and he spoke to the policeman; his incredible words were audible and distinct; you could hear them without an effort; indeed they leaped into one's ear and stayed there and like obscene insects they bred themselves half a dozen times over in two seconds; he said:

'This is the person, officer, and I give her in charge for theft.'

'Come on, mum,' said the policeman, and he said it to her.

She gasped.

'How dare you,' she stammered, 'How dare you!'

The policeman had a moment of misgiving – that nose. These contours of rectitude!

The draper turned to an assistant –

'This is the person, is it not?'

The assistant regarded her profoundly, and replied:

'That's her; she swiped, took two pairs of silk stockings off my counter. She put them into her muff.'

He pointed at the muff, and his fingers remained pointing.

The policeman extended an unending hand towards the muff. She leaped from his hand as one would leap from fire, but some one gripped her elbows from behind and jerked her arms backwards. Then the draper put forward his veined claw and delicately, lengthily, fished out of her muff two pairs of long, grey, silk stockings. He held them high, inert and dangling before the eyes of the policeman and handed them daintily to him who pouched them without regard for the fabric.

'It is not the first time this has happened,' said the draper, 'and this is not the only charge we will make against this person. Articles have been disappearing from our establishment for a long time. We ordered solitary sets of specially marked material from the wholesalers and these have been stolen. We have traced all the missing goods to this woman, and I intend to get a warrant to search in her house for our property.'

That unending hand reached towards her again and the grip on her elbows had not relaxed.

She shrank from the policeman.

'Don't! Don't!' she said.

But he put his hand on her shoulder, and at the touch she opened her mouth widely and screamed twice so that the whole shop tingled and went still.

'Come on, mum!' said the policeman.

She thrust all her weight backwards. 'I want a cab,' she cried. 'I won't go unless you get me a cab.'

The great hand suddenly became a compulsion, but the eyes she looked into, the voice she heard, were kindly.

'We'll get a cab outside, mum!'

The Dial
August 1920

Ireland Returning to her Fountains

More than any other activity of man the arts require peace and leisure in order to function successfully, and, notwithstanding her very great vitality, Ireland has had no peace or leisure for a round number of centuries. The gifts she has given to English art and letters are considerable and worthy if viewed sympathetically, but English literature is rich of its own impulse, and would not be noticeably the poorer if these gifts were abstracted.

For a long period of time Ireland was fully engaged in battling for her life (she had no time for gentler matters), and when not thus bloodily employed she was as earnestly and rigorously battling for her living. Nothing that she retains of either body or spirit was kept but at the cost of incessant struggle, and the wonder is not that she has given so much to common culture but that she has been able to give anything at all.

Up to a hundred years ago the English language was not a natural inheritance of the Irish people, and it was used by those who attempted it with something of the awkwardness with which one handles a recently acquired instrument. They often did good work, they seldom did great work, and it is only within the last fifty years that the Irish mind has learned to express itself easily and powerfully and artistically in the foreign tongue. That a true literary talent exists in Ireland is sufficiently proven by the works of Irish masters during the past fifty years, and today the best Irish writers can hold their own with their fellow-craftsmen across the channel.

The war came and, with it, the artistic pause which had commenced some fifteen years previously became not a pause but a complete halt. Finis was written to a chapter of human activity and achievement, and it is still a word with which man is confronted when he looks out of himself and at a new and unknown world.

Long before the war Europe had reached one of these periods of intellectual stagnation which seem to come, like weather or trade, in

slightly irregular cycles of between thirty and fifty years. Oblations were being poured to every kind of unknown god, and the writers and artists of Europe were engaged not so much in producing work as in experimenting with it and theorizing about it.

Diversified as these experiments seemed they were yet similar in one respect – they were all trying to achieve by violence that which can only be organized by power. Men were using bad temper to do the work of good humour. The workmen were unhappy and blamed their tools. The painter discovered, with rage, that his canvas was only two-dimensional. The poet proclaimed that this language had solidified into a block of clichés and was about as flexible as a slag-heap. The philosopher held that all values had been recreated without being renamed and were, for thinking purposes, *in abscondito*. The musicians (the painters, too) found that the dead are with us to such an unqualified extent that the living could not live against their ghostly competition. There was a whole tendency to believe that 'tradition' is of the devil and that the past would be scrapped; and violence seemed indicated as the one way out.

We had Nietzsche with a philosophy of violence, Wagner with a music of violence, Rodin with a sculpture of violence, the Russians with a literature of violence, the futurists with a painting of violence, the feminists and socialists with a violent social theory: while labour and capital were working the extreme ends of their one stick with ever-increasing anger.

Something nihilistic or anarchistic was epidemic through the world, and although the violence of these men and groups was well intentioned it inevitably led where violence must go. Violence is the action of people who will insist on getting things done by any means rather than that of thinking them out. And the fine flower of that impatience was plucked by us all in August of 1914; the fruit has still to set our children's teeth on edge.

Like every other country Ireland has suffered in men, morals and vitality from the great war; and the consequent lassitude, culminating in intellectual and artistic stagnation, has been as evident here as elsewhere. For, at a stroke, all the writers of Europe (neutrals not excepted) began to write nothing but gibberish, and those who refrained from writing gibberish simply refrained from writing altogether. It must be difficult for any man of integrity to look his own war writings square in the face and not blush for them; and in a world where all values have now gone by the board it is difficult for any writer to know how he is to write again, or what there is in fact

to write about. All writing is of or out of the past; the past has been broken with and Europe must wait until a new past has been created before she can hope to become artistically interesting again.

Although it may seem paradoxical to say so, Ireland had largely escaped the universal trouble by being so thoroughly immersed in her own one. All that wild questioning, which was really a problem for statesmen, economists and educationalists, scarcely touched her, and she pursued with unremitting devotion the quest for national freedom which the world had come to believe would be her eternal occupation. But she had never believed that there was no hope for her and no future. She had never despaired, and the words of that old Gaelic writer – 'the counsel of God as regards virgin Eire is at all times more wonderful than can be told' –could be accepted by any Irish person without trouble or astonishment.

Patient and unselfish work was at all times going forward with us. Yeats and Griffith and Hyde were, each in his own way, rebuilding slowly and consecutively all that had been destroyed before them. Russell, Connolly and O'Grady were trying to disinter the buried genius they believed in and were the prophets of. And in Easter week the men these had trained came forward to carry on the work, and, with a beautiful disbelief in the reality of numbers, put two hundred odd men into the field, or on the roof, to combat Colossus. Within a year Ireland agreed with them that numbers do not count, and carried on. It is the one beautiful story in the whole grim nonsense of the great war.

It is one of the curiosities of national psychology that the gifts of one nation are not readily accepted by another. England had power and wealth and culture to give, and, although these could not be got elsewhere, Ireland refused them. Whatever good Ireland might have brought to the common stock England did not require, and did not get. The fact is that England and Ireland are self-sufficing nations, each containing within itself all that is required for national existence. England required nothing of us: She might then very easily have left us alone and it is true to say that naught but the English will-to-power is at the root of our shameful history.

I am inclined to predict that Ireland will turn more and more completely from England, and will cultivate the human relations she requires in quite other directions. The young state will be unable to place any barrier of language between the two peoples, and the very first parliament that Ireland gets will set enthusiastically to the task of re-gaelicizing the nation. Thus only can they stay, not so

much the emigration of men as the emigration of mind, which has been our chief handicap in the struggle for life and the gravest national evil that has befallen us.

There is to be considered also the fact that Ireland, which was a very old nation, is now a very young one, while England, young in the days of Elizabeth, is no longer as young as she was.

Given the return of Ireland to her natural language, and this is almost absolutely certain: There will follow in a few generations the almost total disappearance of Irish literature in the English tongue. More than this will follow. The influx of several million new speakers will break up the Irish language as we now know it, and further generations must elapse before Irish is recast and capable of modern literary usage.

What is true of literature will be true of the other arts. Ireland will be much too busy setting her house in order to take much interest in anything else, and such work as she does will for a long time be naive and tentative. We may say, as they used to say long ago at the death of a king: Ireland is dead, long live Ireland. She must grow all over again and time must be allowed her to do so. But during that growth she will have much to feed on and brood over. Behind her is an age-long inheritance of history and culture, almost unknown to the present generation, but containing in itself boundless possibilities of interest, inspiration and pride. The new pyschology will grow out of the old one; the new religion may have much to do with the old mythology. We have not such deep roots in the past for nothing, and we are bound to go back before we can dream of going forward again.

The nation that has a mythology is blessed beyond expression. She has but to bathe again in her own fountains to be refreshed from whatever travail, and Ireland is returning to her fountains. She will not only retire from England; she may retire from the world, and, like some happy anchorite, she may live in contentment, unheard of, unminded, until the time comes for her to do whatever work the gods assign her.

She has earned a rest after one thousand bitter years, and one could hope that she might never again have a history.

Survey
26 November 1921

An Adventure in Prophecy

Prophecy, after all, is merely the logical continuance of the known into the unknown; and, on the data we have, it should be quite easy to prophesy for at least fifty years ahead.

It is also an admirable exercise to try to peer into the future; and, as the prophet need not prove that he is right, and as no one else can prove that he is wrong, it is a safe trade for any person to enter headlong.

The unknown is inconceivable. We may, therefore, hold that there is no such thing, and that all history and progress is merely a getting and begetting of the thing we already have. It is the game that supplies the interest: otherwise, cricketers would long ago have wearied of stealing runs, boxers of acquiring knock-outs, and baseball players of being shrieked at by enthusiastic and unknown females; for these results have all been obtained innumerably by their fathers and grandfathers and great-grandfathers. So the games of war, literature, and music are perpetually being played, with nations as teams, and the honours to be acquired have been got as immemorially and diversely as in the other games mentioned.

Mental energy usually follows on the heels of physical energy, and the country that is playing the hardest is the country that is getting ready to think the hardest. It is a mistake to suppose that play is the reward of work: it is merely its preliminary, and the country that cannot get its games going will not get much else going, either.

When Russia invented the ballet and America the tango, they were both preparing for something more than dancing. The ballet is danced with the other leg of Tolstoy; the tango is danced with the other leg of Whitman; and the modern world has no better men to show, and, apparently, no better dancing.

The country that does not export something ridiculous may be alive, but it is not kicking. It is past its playtime, and is either well into middle age and its physical reluctances, or well on its way to old

age and a long sleep. These conditions of middle age and old age are the conditions apparent in the Europe of to-day. She requires a long rest, and is making up her mind to have it and to watch younger competitors undertake the business she once was supreme in.

All activities are protean, and mental activity is not less so than any of the other forces of nature; for, although force may be always the same, the form in which it is momentarily defined seems as out of our control as the elements are; which is but to say that, although we may understand ourselves very well, we are rather at a loss when coping with, or accounting for, our environment, that is, our collectivity; for man's environment is simply other men, and objective nature has been largely put out of the game.

At one time man decides that he can express himself more satisfactorily, that is, more easily, in action, and he initiates schemes of work or invention or war, satisfying thus some obscure desire of being. At another, we all conceive that we are actually interested in thought; then the chatter of the salon revives and the feminine gender gets its chance again.

Just as men have always been interested in discovering the philosopher's stone, or the elixir of life, so they have been interested in the periodicity of things, and have speculated as gravely, and perhaps as ludicrously, about the one as about the other. So there have been people who ascribed occult significances to certain numbers and their multiples, and who have tried to discover if there may not be, underlying the measures of time, general laws and particular applications of them, which could equally interest the social philosopher and the man of science.

It is a sane postulate that law underlies all phenomena, and that the sequence of the seasons, or of birth, growth, maturity, and decay, can be applied to any other matter we are interested in. The organizations of a man and a nation are different only in terms of duration. A man lives quicker than a nation does; but the facts of childhood, maturity, and age are as evident in the one case as in the other.

Climatic evolution is similarly periodic, ticking in terms of thirty years from good weather to bad, with the exactitude of a grandfather's clock. Trade booms and depressions follow the like sequences, and in the matter of art, the same growths, maturities, decays, and reemergings are to be traced. Flinders Petrie, the great Egyptologist, has indicated some of these recurring phases in books that are well worthy of being read again by those who may have

forgotten them. And the peripatetics of art can be as easily followed as the passages of dynasties are.

The nation whose period of activity has arrived has usually two strings to its bow. Thus, Germany had metaphysics and music to play with; England, literature and mechanics; France, psychology and war, and so forth. For nearly all of these nations the period of work in the form specified has passed, and a new phase of life is beginning for them. We need not look any more to England for literature, to France for psychology (which is largely criticism), or to Germany for music. But if we can discover the conditions in other countries which are analogous to those of the England, France, and Germany of long ago, we may hazard a guess as to whence the world's supply of art, and so forth, is to come.

Historic England may be considered roughly as the period from fifty years before the birth of Chaucer to the death of Shelley. Before that period, all was tentative; during it, all was achievement: after it, all was inertia. And to-day that splendid initiative has run its course. The like appears to be true of Germany and France, except that France seems to have gone further on the road to dissolution than her companion nations have.

But these areas are the business of young peoples, and England, France, and Germany are no longer young. Leaving (and it is temerarious to do so) the East out of the question, I would suggest that the young nations of the world now are America, Italy, and Russia and that it is by the energies of these three countries that the world will be moved, until their work also is done.

It takes time, however, to attain to, or to recognize and organize, a national inheritance, and much water will flow before any change is apparent in existing conditions, except the change that was already evident before the war. That change consisted in the fact that the countries named had ceased to produce the qualities for which they were famous, and that these qualities were appealing elsewhere, if only in the germ.

Music and metaphysics had shifted from Germany to Russia. Literature and mechanics are shifting from England to America, and actual social and critical intelligence has, I think, deserted France for Italy.

The countries named seem to have more vitality, curiosity, invention than any others: but for English-speaking people, the new world-activity is more readily discernible than for the others, and especially so in literature.

It is safe to predict a great literary renaissance in America. All the raw material, all the fresh interest and driving energy are there, and her one necessity now is to forget English literature, from Dickens to Wells, and to let her own wells bubble like the dickens. Indeed she had started doing that some years back: and, like the beginning of anything, the first result is unpleasant and incoherent. But the old standards are not quite as satisfying as they once were: the powerful hands of Messrs Kipling and Anthony Hope are begining to relax what had seemed like an eternal grip, and American brains are growing self-conscious and self-sufficing.

Saving everybody's presence, I think the American story is the saddest invention of modern times; and it seems less to have been produced by a man's head than by a donkey's hoof. But the energy wasted on these tales cannot be paralleled in Europe; and within the last few years certain American writers have appeared, who are actually trying to write, and who understand that writing is a beautiful and very difficult art, demanding all of thought and sweat that a full-grown man has. America has attained national equilibrium, and her writers may be with us in less than a generation.

If one may speak of nations in the terms of master and pupil, it is reasonable to say that England has been the master of America, Germany the master of Russia, and France the master of Italy: and in interchange not only of gifts but of national characteristics has taken place between these various countries. Therefore, the person who wishes to be wise before the event should look to these pupil nations for the arts and magnificences which their tutors have grown out of.

It may seem odd, in a world packed with small and healthy nationalities, that these lighter tribes should be disregarded in this hasty summary. But they are left out of malice aforethought. With the exception of Ireland, the small nations of the world are elderly little people. They have lived now for several centuries in a tranquility that is near neighbour to stagnation; and if they had anything in their sacks worth giving to the world, they would have traded it long ago, or advertised somehow that they had it. None but an enraged optimist would look to Scandinavia or the Low Countries, to Switzerland, Hungary, or Spain, for any more artistic exports than emigrants, antique furniture, and cuckoo clocks. These countries are contemporaneous in history with their greater neighbours, and really fall within their orbit of influence and fortune.

With Ireland the case is different, for she is young again. She was not a partaker in her neighbours' affluence or culture, and she plays – that is, she has quite recently taken to dancing and hurling; and as the Irish dances are the most strenuous form of gayety known to the world, so hurling is the most strenuous and deadly fashion of sport that the mind of man has invented. She will hop or hurl into self-expression, though the devil himself stood in the way.

Ireland is now the world-baby, and should be very benevolently regarded by her lustier brothers of the future. Therefore, in writing this prophetical article, I place her under the protection of America, Italy, and Russia, and I wish them all Godspeed and good hunting.

Atlantic
May 1922

The Outlook for Literature with Special Reference to Ireland

I

It is as easy to foretell next year's weather as to foretell next year's literary orientation, but the laws underlying supply and demand are so curiously perfected that even a demand for prophecy can be met with some kind of goods. There is a great deal known about weather, and although the knowledge does not greatly assist the weather-forecasters in their prognostications, it does provide them with matter upon which they can converse intelligently; and there is a sufficiency of data about art to enable us not only to gossip agreeably, but to speculate upon it, and to draw conclusions from it which we may allow the march of events to prove or disprove or neglect.

In referring to artists I do not here refer to Shakespeare or Dante or their peers. Such men stand above comparison or criticism, and

possess a technic which lesser men can no more manipulate than they can play marbles with mountains. I speak of the ordinary man who cannot paint, but does, and who cannot write, but cannot be prevented from writing, and who pleases his contemporaries largely because he explains to them that which they already know, than which no explanation is more acceptable. These are the artists and writers, and it is their business, by hook or by crook, to live, and to do the work that people like them to do as well as ever it can be done. Their work is to tell the truth as closely as they can manage it. Ultimate truth cannot properly be required of the artist, but immediate or local truth is his proper business, and this is almost entirely a matter of emotional appreciation. Probably there never was an intellectual artist, and probably there never will be one, for life is being, and the artistic reaction to it is an emotional one.

In immediate terms, truth is that to which we are sympathetically attracted. We may amuse ourselves with intellections, but it is a temperamental loyalty that we give to a person, an art, or an idea, and the intellectual truth of that person or thing is seldom questioned by us and seldom examined; for truth, on the various planes of being, is not an intellection. It is a passion, the passion of life, and it sways us in blind hungers, blind loves, blind loyalties, and blind ambitions. It sways us unconsciously, in other words, and it is always incapable of being expressed or explained or exposed. Art, therefore, can only remind us of something we have done or suffered, and it can convey to no man an experience which he has not personally fathomed. Culture is a conversation between equals, and the artist on every grade is the liaison officer who links that vast diversity together for social purposes. All those bundles of proceeding and digested actions is the thing we call life, and, still speaking in immediate terms, it makes thinking look like nothing at all; for by the side of an action no thought is valid, and the person who truly meditates an action will be withheld by no reasonable consideration, or by any other power than that sense of caution which is only a glyph on fear or incapacity.

This endless succession of deeds that are passions is the stuff that must be translated out of the whirl of movement into the thin quietude of words and paint and speculation, and it can be translated only by a passion that is the equal of itself; for if the artist is not that passion embodied, then art will continue to be an ineffective watering-down of reality until the mind has evolved an inward power that is at least the equal of its outward manifestation.

Everywhere the artist is in revolt against art, for there is a profound cultural discontent on every side, which must have as profound a cause. It is useless to dismiss it, for it will continue despite our displeasure, and it is senseless to try to ignore it, for no cultivated man can afford to be ignorant of anything that is happening in his time, and, be it good or bad, that is happening mainly because of him. You cannot tango or shimmy-shake and think that art will not begin to slip and waggle also; for the only difference between the artist and the ordinary man is that the artist is more sensuously appreciative than the ordinary man is. He often gets and earns a bad reputation by reason of this excessive sensibility. You cannot throw the world into violent and nonsensical war and think that art will register anything but that violence and nonsense. What man does, and thinks about it, is the material of the artist, and he will return exactly that which is furnished to him and which he is familiar with. Inspiration, as it is called, is a passionate recording of exact knowledge, for passion without exactitude is just nihilism; while exactitude without passion is only the labour of a pedant.

What is the ideal attitude toward life for the artist? It is that he should be endlessly sensitive and insensitive. So sensitive that a cruelty or injustice done to other people will set him mad; so insensitive that an injustice to himself will tickle him to death. He is not a self, but a national or communal conscience. His protest is against ugliness and maladjustment. Perhaps one should say, the ugliness that is maladjustment, for it may be that there is no other ugliness; and, so far as his powers go, his own work will be free from all those bad qualities which he has publicly undertaken to criticize and force toward remedy. But it is well for him to remember that in every picture he paints he presents, with his matter, his limitations. He is always engaged on his own portrait. Even in his choice of a subject, to say nothing of his conduct of it, he is making a definite statement about himself which can be very cruelly read and very contemptuously dismissed. A book is the person who wrote it; there is nothing in it that is not of that person, and it would be an easy thing to name bullies, traitors, and thieves by merely reciting the titles of stories. That is why there should be an ideal attitude toward life for the artist, as there is for the physician, the priest, and the philosopher. Literature is an ideal expression of the environment; that is, of the human society it is born from. As that society is noble, greedy, brutal, or artistic, so the literature it generates reveals this, that, or the other quality of the time. In my own country of Ireland

man is now in the making, and in a very few years our national action will tell us what it is we may hope for culturally, or what it is that we may be tempted to emigrate from. But Irish national action and culture can no longer be regarded as a thing growing cleanly from its own root. We have entered the world. More, the world has entered us, and a double, an internal and external, evolution is our destiny, as it is the destiny of every other race in the world. We shall learn the Irish language; we must. We shall *talk* like Irishmen, or we are done for: we shall *think* like Europeans, or we are done for. There lies our internal and external evolution, and there the gifts we shall give to and accept from the world, and in those concussions and repercussions will be forged our art, our literature, and ourselves.

2

In these days of swift intercourse no country can be regarded as possessing an existence independent of or even removed from the rest of the world, and the artistic, economic, and social repercussions from all quarters are now more unescapable than they have been hitherto. They never could be ultimately eluded, but they might be referred, as it were, to the ides of March, and left till Never came. Never is upon us, and, in this time of quick dissemination of ideas and commodities, action and reaction are to be looked for almost immediately after the appearance of whatever new idea provokes them.

Whoever takes thought for the future of Irish literature must think of Dostoyevski, of Tolstoy, of Sudermann, of Romain Rolland, of Marcel Proust, and of a host of lesser men, who, although they are not working in his vernacular, are still delving in the very stuff that his thoughts are made of. The music, painting, literature, and economics of to-day are no longer local or sporadic. They are world inheritances, or, rather, world urges; and for their purposes it is correct to say that there is universal idea with which every national speech must be saturated if that speech is to continue as a living medium of expression or to represent anything whatever of actuality.

The past is a word to conjure with, it is a word to hypnotize with, but it is not a word to evoke reality. Reality is present action. The past is the memory of actions done, and, as these are incorporated in our present minds, we need not be afraid that we shall greatly

depart from them or shed more of our national characteristics than we have no use for. It is certain that Ireland will revisit her past with vast curiosity and reverence, but she will not remain there long enough to eat a railway sandwich. She will return with her booty to the eternally present time of an eternally modern world. The Irish past is not a catalogue of events and personages. The Irish past is the Irish language. Learn that and you will have enough of the past to last you for the entire of your future, and you will have done the one thing necessary to make this nation a nation, and to prepare for a literature, an art, and a culture which will not be an abject imitation or a dishonest forgery.

3

There never was an archaic period in the history of the world. At every moment man is modern, and while his needs do not change except in vast cycles of time, his technic of living requires modification in every few generations. Between the technic of living and the technic of art there is no difference. They are simultaneous expressions of the same thing. Life at present, jazz at present, cubism and dadaism at present, represent the one identical lack of control which is the present technic of life, and it is in this matter of technic that the immediate interest of our time lies, and it is from the same technic that three quarters of our inquiry will be answered. If we could discover a mind of sufficient scope to comprehend the hundred technical adventures and experiments that are now engrossing the scientific and artistic minds of the world, such a mind would draw from them the generalization which is all we need to start our new schools upon; but that critical intelligence has not yet revealed itself, and does seem to be as lacking in every land as is the creative intelligence of the artist, which is also in eclipse.

Art is, in fact, seeking enthusiastically, and at times wildly, for the technic which can be applied to a new order of ideas, and the fact that a technical problem is pressing for settlement implies positively enough that a new order desires to function. This impatience of the old craft and the old craft form is apparent in every department of effort, and it is evident that a vast historic phase, artistically, culturally, socially, and economically, has come to its decline, and that a modified chaos will continue in being until a synthesis is made, and the obvious order is drawn from the apparent disorder in

which we find ourselves. In olden days it would have been correct to say, that if you change a road you change a country; but to-day it would be true to say that if you alter a technic you change a continent, and the statement will register the difference between a psychology that will visit this earth no more and a psychology which is still a matter for speculation.

In painting, in music, in psychology itself, a new conception is struggling into birth, and only a few generations may be necessary to put out of date, as it has already put out of countenance, the culture that we automatically inherited, and which, by mere habit and possession, we are inclined to consider as the only culture that is possible.

The ear and the eye, the instruments with which we investigate external effects, are the veriest slaves of the mind they seem to inform, and should that mind become interested in a different musical scale, our ears would obediently assure us that a sonata by Beethoven is only an ignorant uproar, and that the new thing, which previously had visited us like a toothache, is really a miracle of justness and harmony. So with the eye, a small modification in technic would enable us to regard a picture by Rembrandt with the same incredulous and forlorn inquiry that we now turn on Chinese and Japanese masterpieces. Change technic, and apparently you alter all, and it seems absolutely certain that the world is bent on that great transformation.

It is art that will first bring to consciousness that which the unconscious has motived, for art is less a method of portrayal than a criticism of life, and its explanatory analysis is one of the most valuable facts we know of. Bound up with this mental change are corresponding world changes so vast in their scope that a mind which is still thinking in the old terms will be unable to regard them without fear and unbelief; for there is no such thing as a solitary change or a solitary anything, and one radical alteration in our mode of thought will present us with a new universe, and a new man to cognize it.

4

Is Ireland doing anything to prepare herself for this tumultuous and engrossing future? It is certain that none but a young nation can deal with it, and I think that no country which, in the scriptural

phrase, 'has great possession', or an ancestral idolatry of them, will be able to deal with it at all; for with this change much more than artistic processes must go by the board.

Ireland, I think, can stand it. An act is always truer than a thought, for it is thought clothed in reality, and during the last five years the national act of Ireland has been so real that it has achieved what older minds considered to be impossible, and has achieved it by methods which the official and logical intellect, if its advice had been sought, could only have considered as infantile. It is the good fact of life that the infant wins always, and I think that Ireland awakens from her profound sleep as the youngest race now active in the world, and the best fitted to accept possible modifications with the curiosity and good humour of a brave young person.

If we search curiously enough for anything, we shall find it, and if we strive to discover the dominant fact in the last hundred and fifty years, it is not beyond the wit of man to place a finger on it. The idea that has dominated the European mind during the later historic period is the idea of speed; and as man transplanted himself from place to place with greater facility, so every other action and attribute of his came under the same dominating idea, and a universal adjustment to new velocities is now part of our unconsidered inheritance.

The steamship tried to keep pace with the railway train, the printing-press tried to go faster. The woollen-mill, the shoe-factory, the baker, the tailor, were paced by the steam-engine. There are no records; they are all abreast. We have speeded up the beehive and the cabbage-patch; we make cows give twice as much milk in half as much time, and we are assisting the domestic hen to provide a weightier egg on less food than she had been accustomed to. It is an actual fact that we are living unconcernedly in a world the velocity of which would have worn our ancestors into rags in less than ten years, and now the aëroplane has come to make us go still faster, and to alter every aspect of the world we know into something that we cannot even conjecture. Do we really consider that the airman, the movie-man, and the psychoanalyst are signs of nothing, or that they have been evolved by nothing from nothing and are going nowhere?

It is a mistake to speak of this as the age of mechanics. It is the age of speeding-up, and that speeding-up is even more ideal than it is material. That is, the process takes place as much in the mind as in outer material. And it is a stupidity to consider that the mind can be more than temporarily dominated by its own inventions. The effect

which the mind externalizes is visible to us as this and that invention. The effect of that creative effort on the mind itself is not so quickly appreciable, but it is much more real than any of its toys are.

The person who thinks that we can do a thing and not become it must think again. It is not that our cities, our modes of locomotion, and our social views and actions have changed; the mind itself has undergone the transformations which are visible in our surroundings, and in the examination of that mental change we find the explanation of, and the necessity for, a new psychology, for a new valuation of the values, for a new art, and for a new technic of human conduct, whether in art or morality. We may say, with perfect fitness, 'The world is dead! Long live the world!' for to-day a new world is born, and is greatly distressing the nurses who are teaching it to walk when it quite obviously ought to be learning to fly. Are not the cubists, the dadaists and the makers of free-verse trying to fly? It is exactly what they are doing, and more power, or more wings, to their elbows!

These ideas may seem fantastic, but all ideas are fantastic until they become accepted, and then, by mere process, they rapidly become ridiculous, in other words unsuitable, and a new fantasy pushes them to the ditch. The thing which has not kept pace in the general acceleration is education, and by that I mean the whole scheme of cultural control, which is framed to make man a subservient instrument of life rather than to equip him as the living being that he is; and it is scarcely too much to say that every idea in the text-books was framed to fit a servile order that has disappeared, and that they are of no help and of much hurt at this period. Has the servile order disappeared? It may be that in the generalization alone the whole modern secret has been uttered.

5

Has all this anything to do with the future of Irish literature? It has everything to do with it, for Irish literature will be a part of world literature, drawing nourishment from the ends and ends of the earth. It will be a description of the ideas and actions of the modern Irishman in a modern world. I say 'ideas and actions': I place the word ideas before the word action, for unless there are ideas there is no action, there is no literature, there is no art, but only an imitation

of these, and that imitation is taken from a cabbage or a cow. Nothing in this modern world is isolated: all things are in concord with one another, or in a discord that is more apparent than real, for they are all fundamentally interrelated and interdependent. Some one has said that any war in Europe is civil war, and it is true, for the European type has been evolved and does contain and override all that is local or peculiar within it. So, in this modern world, we cannot any longer speak in terms of cultural difference of an Ireland, an England, a France, or a Germany. These exist as geographical descriptions, but they are not separated things. There is a European culture and there is an Asiatic one, the world has grown so small! One or other of these gigantic conceptions will emerge from the final struggle for supremacy as the world culture, and it is for that great struggle that the world is set prow on.

But by geography and tradition Ireland will go with her neighbours. If our culture is less than European, it will frankly be nothing at all; it will not be worth attention; it will not be worthy of one man's loyalty or one instant's hope, and at the head or tail of the European procession Ireland must take her place or die. I include America in the term 'European', for she is, in fact, the essence of Europe, and she is present in Europe as a ferment is present in a brew, and she is perhaps the most vital factor in the European future.

I consider the sceptre of artistic dominance began to pass as long as twenty years ago from the nations who then held it – that is, from England, France, and Germany – to other nations whose energy enables them to accept the great legacy. These other nations are America, Russia, and Italy, and it is from their rivalries and cooperations that the new social order and the new art and literature will emerge; with our assistance I hope, for we are younger than they all, and essentially more energetic than the three together. Ireland may never have existed as a political entity, but as a centre of essential energy Ireland deserves to be ranked as one of the wonders of the world.

With the decline of the former great nations the art they stood for declines with them, and the question of the future of Irish literature requires an Irish examination and a world examination to resolve it. What is this Irish literature in which we are all interested, and in which, I suppose, we are all experimenting? A hundred years ago our national culture was suppressed so thoroughly that the very memory of it has almost disappeared from our common mind. If one

were to make very large generalizations as to world literature, we might say that in the recent period only England and France could be referred to in terms of world-wide approbation, and that in both of these literatures the predominant fact was a brutal idealism, the brutal part of which is now exhausted, leaving the idealistic part without power to function. We could say that German literature disclosed a certain home-loving quality and a dull interest in the domesticities or mechanics of life: it was a well articulated piece of machinery, and of immense dullness. We could say that France was noted for an effort to achieve formal perfection and for an apparently endless sex interest, into which her literature sank as into a bog. The outstanding facts in English literature, on its popular plane, appears to me to be brutality and boyishness. In the first chapter you discover the murdered man, and in the last one you hang the person who didn't do it.

What, even in these hasty terms, does Irish literature in the English tongue stand for? Irish fiction, Irish poetry, with the most pitifully few exceptions, are only timid and ineffectual imitations of the English mode; and our young artists (read their books if utter boredom does not prevent you) can be as cruel, as grimy, and as sentimental as any Garvice or Le Quex of them all. They do not write, they copy, and they do it badly, for it is a prime fact in both art and life that a copy cannot be done well. Ask American literature if a copy can be done well. There is no future for us there. We cannot rival them in the tricks of that trade which is all trickery, where the rogue is hero, and the heroine is a fool. Or will any one be temerarious enough to say that Shaw or Moore or Dunsany are producing Irish literature, or that Wilde or Goldsmith or Swift did produce it? We must get back to our own language, which is our psychology, our technic, and our treasure-house; then only shall we know if we have anything to say, and we will learn quickly enough how to say it.

6

The European technical apparatus went out of date at least fifteen years ago, and there is no longer a standard for art to follow. It has to be recreated and reorganized. Nietzsche and Wagner tried to recreate it by injecting violence into it instead of beauty; and they have failed, as all their militaristic successors have failed.

If any artists have cause to be weary of current technical processes

it is surely ours, who have been associated with it so long and so futilely. Are we irredeemably enamoured of the tale of hearty fun, which consists in robbing someone? Of the historical narrative which sets forth how a strong, silent man was neither strong nor silent, but did manage to get away with everybody's goods that he came in contact with? Of the psychological tale, which succeeds, after Olympian difficulties, in marrying two persons who would really have got married on the dropping of a hat? Are those robberies and murders and marryings of actually permanent interest, and do they truly represent something that nourishes or sustains the spirit of man? The poetic literature of England is one of the mightiest efforts that a national mind has ever achieved, but her prose literature has never grown up. It was written on the playing-grounds of Eton. From the Round Table through Scott and Stevenson to Conrad it is always a boy's tale, with adventures borrowed from the criminal calendar, and a psychology that is taken bodily from the cricket-field; and I think it is to-day as dead as is the literature of Belgium, of Spain, or of Switzerland.

But what is true of these is generally true of Europe. The models from which they all worked have ceased to apply in the modern world, and there is no hope for art or literature but in the wild men who paint pictures with their eyes shut, and who write poetry with their ears shut.

Century Magazine
October 1922

An Interview with Mr James Stephens By our Special Correspondent [James Esse]

I called on Mr Stephens to ascertain his views about Mr Michael Ireland's book, 'The Return of the Hero.' I found Mr Stephens in Paris. There was a bock, cool, limpid, golden, at his right hand. A

demi-londres was between his teeth; and his eyes were turned inwards, digesting the sunlight that bathed him – I explained my errand.

'The people of Ireland,' he commenced, 'do not get one-tenth of the sunlight they deserve.'

'No!' I enquired.

'They are a vicious race whom circumstances have conspired to make good, and the consequent bicker between their morals and their temperaments as it cannot be avoided must be perpetual – '

'About this anonymous book,' I injected.

'All books should be anonymous,' said Mr Stephens. 'They ought to be published by a State Department, and should be known only by numbers.'

'Oh!' I expostulated.

'Precisely,' he uttered. 'A book,' he continued warmly, 'is only to a limited extent the work of its titular author. It is really a communal effort, and, as such, it should be credited to the community it derives from.'

'But – !' I exclaimed.

'The author is no more than a glorified amanuensis, or a listener-in to the section of people, actions or ideas, that he is sympathically related to.'

He halted me with a gesture.

'That is for prose. Poetry is an individual matter. It does not derive from the community at all; or, if it does, it is very bad poetry. England,' said Mr Stephens earnestly, 'did not write the "Prometheus Unbound", but Ireland did fabricate the ballads of Davis, Mangan, Ferguson, and achieved a prose-poetry against which we may still implore that "God Save Ireland".'

'It is said,' I entreated him, 'that Mr Michael Ireland has imitated your method of writing.'

Here Mr Stephens sunk into an adoration of the golden body and snowy peruke of his bock which, as it threatened to be lasting, provoked me to a repetition of my question. His answer was not illuminating; he said: –

'It is a mistake to be clean-shaven.'

As it was evident that he passionately desired to combat this mistake I begged him to do so.

'If a man drinks beer without getting any of it on his moustache he has not quite, or conscientiously, drunk beer. The use of a

moustache,' he said firmly, 'is to prolong the flavour of one's victuals.'

He lifted one eye slightly and gazed into my soul.

'The female sex no longer admires moustaches,' he murmured, 'and you cannot catch flies with them.'

The matter had never appeared to me in these terms, but I could find no way of disagreeing with them – I continued my interview – 'Mr Michael Ireland has been – '

'Acclaimed,' said Mr Stephens.

'Precisely,' I went on, 'has been acclaimed for writing in your mode – '

'Literature written in the English tongue – ' said Mr Stephens.

'Mr Michael Ireland – ' I murmured unhappily, 'can no longer afford to imitate the Bible. That process has continued so long that English literature and the English Bible have been deprived of their inspiration, and a hint of the periods and cadences that once commanded respect now inspires but unmitigated horror. Writers must seek another great model, and it is hopeful,' said Mr Stephens, 'it is hopeful and heartening to discover that they know where to look for it.'

He relit his cigar for the fifth time, and resumed musingly:

'To be the turning-point of a world literature! It is a responsibility that even the ambitious might seek to evade; but no man can refuse his destiny, and I shall not attempt to do so. I shall not refer to these humble seekers after perfection as imitators as Mr Gwynn would. I shall not denounce them as fleas as Mr Yeats did. I shall speak of them as disciples, and they will hail me lovingly as Master.'

Here in one enthusiastic movement he drained his glass, and briefly addressed the attendant:

'Une bock,' he said.

'I,' he explained, 'am very sparing in my use of the French tongue. I have discovered that foreigners do not understand their own language very well.'

'So!' I said.

'So,' he confided. 'They misapply their genders.'

'Ah!' said I.

'Yes,' he continued. 'The Latin races suffer from a sex-obsession that has invaded their speech, and all these tongues are cluttered up with genders that are significant of nothing but perversity.'

'No!' I whispered.

'Precisely,' said Mr Stephens. 'A door and a window could get married in French, and whatever eventuated would be, inevitably, of a male or female gender. There are no mules among French nouns,' he whispered.

'The Return of the Hero –,' said I.

'But Irish is a prepositional language,' he continued triumphantly. 'It was invented by Canon O'Leary and Dr Bergin – '

'No!' I said.

'Yes,' said he. 'Two bachelors,' he said, 'and they made the word "girl" masculine in Irish. Admirable!' said he. 'Realistic! Prophetic even! Women are of course feminine in Irish, they always will be, but girls are masculine to a Jill. The stages by which a woman acquires culture – '

'If Mr Ireland imitated you – ' I began.

'There is always more in things than meets the eye,' said Mr Stephens.

'Michael Ireland,' I implored.

'Precisely,' said he. 'This gentleman is also stated to have imitated Mr Darrel Figgis. If he did so he cannot have imitated me. More, it is urged that he has imitated Mr George Moore, Mr Anatole France, Mr Stephen Gwynn and Mr Robert Lynd. Can even an author of genius imitate ten writers in one swoop of the plume? No, he cannot. Therefore, it is very likely that the gentleman has only imitated himself. The book has been written by a literary man, but it was not written by a novelist. It is an essay in story-form, and it is beautifully done. The description of evening does not remind one of my great poem beginning.

"Its edges foamed with amethyst and gold,"

nor does his dejection, when he condescends to it, consort at all with my lyric

'The woods of Arcady are dead.'

Irish Statesman
22 September 1923

Tochmarc Etainé: *The Immortal Hour*: I

One who wishes to know the facts about the Etain Saga, or Tochmarc Etainé, will have to seek elsewhere for them than in *The Immortal Hour*, now being played in London. The story is of a more than respectable antiquity. The events related are supposed to have taken place in the time of Eochaid (Yohee) Airem, who reigned at Tara about half a century before the birth of Christ. The *Annals of Tigernach* date his reign as contemporaneous with that of Caesar the Great, who died 44 BC.

If Etain was a marriageable girl at that date, she was yet much older than she looked. Long before she came into the life of Ireland and the arms of the High King, she had known alarms and excursions in another time than ours, and in a space as far-flung from Ireland as Ireland is from the moon. She was a goddess, and was born to the luck of the gods; which mortals, blundering among their hieroglyphical remains, can only conceive as the worst imaginable kind of bad luck.

MIDIR APPEARS AS HUSBAND OF ETAIN

In Tir na nóg, the Country of the Young, her husband had been Midir, king of the Shí of Breitleit. The Shí, or Fairyland, is supposed to be under or inside this world, as the skins of an onion are under or inside the onion; and under or inside Fairyland there are again worlds within worlds, to divine infinity. Midir's divine realm paralleled the district known on earth as the County Longford. This king had two wives, Etain, the subject of this Saga, and Fuamnach.

ANGUS STEALS AWAY ETAIN

The Dagda Mór, the Great or Good God, was High King of all the Shis or kingdoms of the Underworld. He had a young son named

Angus Óg, and he sent Angus to be educated at Midir's court. Angus (who is the god of love) fell in love with Etain. He, it is to be supposed, completed his studies, but when he left he brought his tutor's wife with him. Of his two wives, Midir loved Etain the best, and he was inconsiderate enough to lament his vanished darling in the presence of his other wife, Fuamnach, and this lady exhibited a jealousy of the wife missing that she had never shown for the wife present.

It is possible that the person who is faithful to the memory of an absent wife in the presence of a present wife is also one who is seeking for trouble with a lantern. If the territories of the gods parallel our earthly boundaries, their psychology, in love at least, does not greatly depart from that which we are native to. Fuamnach decided to remove Etain. She could not kill the goddess, but she could remove her.

ETAIN IS TRANSFORMED BY THE JEALOUS FUAMNACH

Angus Óg's kingdom coincides on the earthly plane with the countryside now called Ulster, and Fuamnach went there. She contrived a conference with the two husbands of her sister-wife, and while they were engaged in the recriminations and apologies that would attend such a meeting, she visited Etain.

This interview, also, should have been of interest, for Etain may have marvelled, even vociferously, as to why her late co-wife should now be jealous of her; and Fuamnach may have found her explanations either improper or impossible to put into words. It must be that at last the temper of these two ladies reached a point beyond the aid of words, and Fuamnach by her power (against the exercise of which Etain was probably unprepared) changed poor Etain into (of all things in or out of the world) a fly.

It is quite within possibility that on such a rapid transformation Etain did not quite know what to do. Even to be a fly must require some preliminary exercises, and likely enough Etain crouched or huddled exactly where she found herself, and began to agitate a wing and six legs that she could not yet properly control. What a god may do in certain circumstances is dimly conceivable; what a goddess will do is in any event, and especially in circumstances such as this narrated, utterly not to be imagined. Did Fuamnach then

harangue the abashed and inexpert insect, and thus deliver her soul of the accumulated spite that had brought her to this bad deed? But not woman nor goddess can remain indefinitely in conversation with a fly. Fuamnach invented or created a great wind that blew poor Etain right out of that world and right into this one.

ETAIN IS REBORN AS A SEMI-MORTAL

At that epoch the houses in earthly Ulster had flat roofs. On one of these flat roofs a company of nobles and their wives were feasting, and among them one Etair and his wife, whose name we do not know. The wind that had scurried Etain from such unimaginable distances swirled her about this roof and swished her into the glass that Etair's wife was drinking from. The fly and the wine were drunk in the one gulp, and in process of time Etain was re-born as the daughter of this lady, and a human being. Not human, surely, for the first time, for the Shi, or Fairyland, from which she had just come, is also the country that men go to when they are dead. In some of the theories on the subject of reincarnation it is stated that the period lying between birth and re-birth is about fifteen hundred years, and our annals state definitely that Etain was more than twelve hundred years of age when she was re-born.

ETAIN IN *THE IMMORTAL HOUR*

It is, so far, a curious story, amenable certainly to poetic or operatic treatment, but requiring a study which neither the poet nor librettist can bring to it. None of this part of the Saga is told in the adaptation now being played. The play, or music-drama, shows Etain new-come into this world, and all tranced in half-forgetfulness and expectation. Only a slender memory of her ancient glory remains with her, and even that is, instant by instant, slipping away, and the world that now surrounds her is growing real. But in the original story the facts are otherwise narrated, as will be told in a second paper.

The Sphere
1 December 1923

Tochmarc Etainé: *The Immortal Hour*: II

In the Irish story (although not in *The Immortal Hour* version) Etain grew from a baby to be the comeliest of the maids of Ireland. The High King had invited a number of the chief nobles of Ireland to visit him, but they refused to come, fearing, possibly, his usage of the *droit du seigneur* which belonged to his rank. Eochaid, therefore (and not, as in the Fiona McLeod version, in order to woo an Immortal Hour and a beauty more beautiful than beauty's self), in deference to public opinion and in order to live a normal existence, decided to get married, and the choice of his messengers fell upon Etain. Everything was done in order, even to the paying of the 'bride-price' – seven female slaves or their equivalent in other values – and they were married.

MIDIR'S FONDNESS FOR ANGUS

There next follows (of which there is no mention in *The Immortal Hour*) the curious and moving episode – a whole story in itself – in which Ailill, the High King's brother, fell in love with Etain, and of the beautiful and innocent ending of that love affair, due to the intervention of Midir, Etain's ancient and divine husband. For Midir had not ceased to love Etain, and had never lost hope that he would again be with her. When he and Angus Óg discovered what Fuamnach had done they were equally angry and horrified. Indeed, Angus Óg cut off her head, without raising, apparently, any objection from Midir. Midir must have been very fond of Angus, for although Angus had seduced one of his wives and murdered the other, we do not find that he bore any enmity to the young god for deeds which even an abnormal husband might be inclined to regard as excessive. There is in the ancient Irish tales much sexual faithfulness but very little jealousy.

Midir, having discovered where Etain was on earth, came several times for her, but she seems to have forgotten him, and she refused to leave her husband. He even sang the Death Song for her – 'Come with me to the Wonderful Land, the Land of Music. There the primrose blows and blossoms in the hair; all there are white and strong and fair, and naught is known of sorrow there, . . .' etc. But she would not go with him unless her husband permitted her to do so. This curious stipulation causes one to wonder if Midir had 'permitted' her to go with Angus. Midir then turned his attention to her husband, for he intended to obtain that permission.

As one day, Eochaid was looking from the walls of Tara he saw a warrior riding to the palace. The stranger wore a purple tunic; his hair was golden; his blue eyes shone like candles; he carried a five-pointed lance, and bore a shield ornamented with golden beads. It was Midir, and he had come to challenge Eochaid to a game of chess.

MIDIR DEMANDS THE HIGH KING'S WIFE

The High King, who was famous as the champion chess-player of Ireland, accepted the challenge, and won the game and a great treasure from Midir. They played again, and Midir again lost. The third game was for unnamed stakes, the victor to get whatever he asked for. Midir won this game, and his demand horrified the king. He asked for the King's wife.

Eochaid had promised, and could not retract, but he demanded a month's grace. When the time for payment came he closed all the gates of Tara and surrounded his queen with soldiers, but suddenly, although none had seen him come, they were aware that Midir was standing by the queen. 'He has agreed to give you to me,' said beautiful Midir, who that night seemed even more beautiful than ever before. His spear was in his right hand, his left hand was about Etain's waist, and as the scandalised soldiers rushed on him both he and Etain rose lightly in the air and floated through the great chimney-hole in the roof, and they were gone; while those who watched without saw only two snow-white swans, linked by a silver chain, who sped away from Eochaid, away from Tara, away from the world.

At this point *The Immortal Hour* confers death on Eochaid, and ends the tale. But in an Irish Saga, although women may fittingly

die of a broken heart, men do not. A broken head or a broken neck can decently quieten them. The story takes no heed of Fiona McLeod, but goes straight on. Eochaid being High King was (ex-officio) Chief Magician of Ireland. He assembled his assistant druids, and between them he discovered how to get into the Country of the Dead without dying. Eochaid affronted that world; he stormed Midir's fort, and brought Etain back to earth again, and to Tara of the Kings.

If she left Ireland again, she left it by normally dying, a queen, full of years and dignity, a woman fulfilled of children and usefulness. But even at this, the whole story is unfinished; for long afterwards Midir came bitterly back, and in the terrific tale of 'The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel' he visited on Eochaid and Etain's grandson, Conaire, the vengeance that he was unable to execute on the grandparents.

The story is a true Saga, full of interest and variety; it is as carefully planned and constructed as a cathedral, and *The Immortal Hour* is no more than a solitary brick taken from that gigantic edifice.

The Sphere
8 December 1923

The Novelist and Final Utterance

The novelist can only describe an idea by embodying it as a person. Indeed an idea is useless to him unless this transformation can be effected.

Essays on the ideas of jealousy, anger, cupidity, love, can be written by any person, but for the novelist they have no application if they cannot be predicated as conditions or causes by which action can be governed.

The description of one or another of these states as the dominant

in a certain personality, and the placing of that personality in an environment wherein the dominant characteristic is encouraged by being hindered, is the recipe for thousands of stories. When, as in the tale of a stingy man in love, the immediately greater quality is in conflict with an ultimately greater quality, the stage is set for what may be moving drama. It can never be a great story however excellently it be told, for, at last, it is only the narrative of how one habit was eradicated and another implanted, and the change from this to this is of limited importance.

Form in a book resides in the idea that is being immediately discussed; even that changes, and the sole permanence we can ask for is that of the personalities who are engaged in that and the succeeding actions. Action is continuous but not permanent, and it is only for a limited time that even a matured character can take on the appearances of permanence or still-life.

Leaving aside the mechanical arrangement which we call plot, this permanence alone is form. But in fact a book cannot have form. Form is an adventure in space, but a book, being the record of experience, is an adventure in time, and it is conditioned not even by the clock instead of the compass, for it is always in the past tense, which tense neither clock nor compass can deal with.

In every book it is the author who is the real subject. The story he is telling is his choice. It is his interest. And in considering it we are investigating one true facet of the author in his desire-nature.

It was not for nothing nor was it by haphazard that he elected to spend his energy, his imagination and his mind upon this theme. He and this subject are identical, and, when he dares to say, 'It happened thus,' he draws upon himself for his knowledge of that happening. He is every creature in his gallery. He is every action in his piece. And, from the start to the finish, he is charting himself, and describing his own likes, dislikes, hopes, fears, aspirations and mentality.

We can elicit from his books the whole common man by a study of the philosophy, the humour, the memory and the desire he puts into them, and which he cannot but spill into his work. But we shall not find the central man among these gleanings.

The writer can only assure us that he is very much as we are ourselves; endowed perhaps a little more liberally in some quality and a little less liberally in another; but he will not reveal wherein he differs from his neighbour, for that is his secret, and almost any author and almost every man will keep that secret. The telling of it is

the final word in art, and, saving a few poets, none have had the knowledge to utter it finally.

One may enquire, what finality of utterance there can be and whether it be of excessive importance? And, in so enquiring, we may claim that there is little, and possibly is nothing, known to any man which is not as personal to every one of his neighbours. But art has nothing to do with this, and, in divulging himself, the artist tacitly seeks comprehension and admits that it is to be found.

Technically, it is not the rarity of a thing that is in question, but the rarity of its expression. It would seem, so curiously are we contrived, or so binding are the taboos that were laid upon us in vanished ages, that, until we utter a fact it is not in legitimate being. It may be personal to us all: it is not communal to us all, and to be communal is the desire of every emotion and of every thought. Used personally, these forbidden emotions, desires and cogitations can be viewed only as anti-social acts, and, so, as vices and unending sources of personal and public shame. Brought into the publicity of speech, stripped of that secrecy which is perhaps the only real vice that gregarious creatures need fear, these matters are not only exposed, they are exorcised.

It is not by forgiveness that the enemy ceases to trouble us; it is by comprehension simply, for thus one full half of the evil that ignorance would permit is left undone – the half we might have done – and, without that help, the enemy's half can barely function.

These sidelights and courageous perspicuities are the elements in literature that are called originality. They are no more original than sin is, than anything else is; but, except for a superior energy or a technical innovation, they are the only refreshment that a rapidly aging art can discover.

But these have nothing to do with a final utterance, and, except on planes where they can operate (by a writer to an audience that is mutually concerned in them), they are of no more interest than the lesser tricks of a dog are; and they will be bred out of the race by merely admitting them. The bane of prohibitions and indexes and censorships is that they prevent utterance or externalisation and, so, escape for matters that are in themselves unimportant.

The discussion of these matters offers no rare difficulty to the artist who pleases to be interested in them. The writer whose technique is accomplished and who has some subtlety of vocabulary can say anything he pleases on any subject whatever, and in doing so he will not even achieve a *succès de scandale* – the tribute which coarseness

pays to coarseness. He will merely have done his day's work, and have given and provoked a few smiles.

Final utterance is quite other than these things. When we say that such and such a passage is poetry we indicate that finality has been uttered, and we acknowledge also that the writer, his subject, and his reader, have fused into one complete perception. There is no room here for doubt or difference (argument is perpetual motion) for the thing-in-itself has been indicated in the writer and in us: and a sense of the identity of life, its oneness in all matters and aspects, has been revealed to us. Where subject and object merge intimacy is: where that is, greatness is, divinity even; and it is this destruction of the sense of separateness that reveals the great man or the great artist.

Here the critic can neither help nor hinder, for he does not know and cannot know how. Poetry is in truth an occult science – so is every other science. Poetry, knowledge, is incommunicable. It can be understood by the person who understands it. We cannot be taught into that condition, but we can surely believe that we grow into it by practice and study. Before you can be a thing you must do it – that is practice. You must then meditate what you have done – that is study. The apprehension that comes from these two is growth, and to become that thing-in-itself is knowledge.

To be and to know are verbs having the same significance, and the man who describes nobilities and meannesses did not get his knowledge from nowhere nor from hearsay.

Hearsay, information in general, is not an active agent – it unlocks memory. All education and all artistic statement exist for this purpose. They remind us of something we had forgotten; and between the artistic mind that objectifies and the regarding intelligence that subjectifies there is no difference. One equal comprehension unites them, for they have both remembered a common experience which, somewhere, they have both undergone.

Irish Statesman
12 April 1924

Growth in Fiction

To postulate one or other of the qualities, love, jealousy, envy, greed, etc., as the antagonist against which a person might fight, either in himself or in another, is the Balzacian method, but it will ever be the method of every novelist of whatever capacity. Life is a matter not alone of movement but of conflict, and, so, almost every tale is a story of war. But the ideal story is not one in which a person strives and conquers external enemies, but that in which a human being is both the battlefield and the battle.

When the issue of success or failure is reached, that is, when a story is finished, growth must be notified; for if, at the end of a book, the persons undergoing experience do not differ from what they were at the beginning a real story has not been told.

It is curious to see how the novelist will evade this responsibility, and will withdraw the reader's attention from it by every means that he can invent. The usual means is to shift the interest, and this is done by making the goal or object to be attained of superlative desirability.

In most novels the object to be attained is a husband or a wife, and towards the end of the book attention is switched from the action to the prize. The book is refreshed by having a new emotion to end on, and that newness must do in lieu of the real object of our journey.

The book is not ended, or it ends in marriage; that is, it ends at a point which becomes automatically the beginning of a new story; and the personages concerned have not been required to digest any experience they have undergone, but are only expected to be ready to start on another journey if the author should will them to do so.

This novelist shirks his duty. He takes refuge in a story-telling that is endless; and, which is not so plain to see, a story that is pointless; for he has described action for its own sake rather than for the sake of ripening character.

Experience is the thing we learn from, and if we are no different at

the end of an experience we have not learned at all. The experience is worthless, it need not have been undergone. That is, the story need not have been told: and this is true of the vast number of books that are written. Perhaps the novelist himself is enriched by the experience he has imagined and narrated, but nothing has accrued to his characters and little to his reader.

Action by itself is characteristic only of the animal world. It is the brooding on action accomplished that is valuable to human beings, but this brooding is too generally supposed to delay the movement of one's story.

We read so many books in which the hero commences as a youth of sixteen years. When the book is finished ten or twenty years may have elapsed, and a vast cycle of experience has been narrated. But what have we as the result? The hero may now wear a beard, but it is quite obviously a false one; for, in so far as we may gather anything from his speech or conduct, his ideas and modes have changed in nothing that identified him in the first few pages.

He has actually undergone no experience. He is actually still sixteen years of age – but he is married, and we are invited to consider that matrimony is change enough and wisdom enough and fate enough for any man.

The story has been told, but it has not been proved, and we are at liberty not to believe one word of it.

In truth, it is a tale of motion without movement, and it is a thoroughly bad tale. Tolstoi, Dickens, could make time fly and imprint its passage, but for most other and almost all modern novelists time is a state of continuously present vibration where a great deal can occur, and nothing whatever can happen. An apple may ripen in a novelist's orchard, but no person will ripen in his pages: they will get married instead.

Possibly what really happens is, that the faculty or story-telling runs away with the book, and in the so-called story of action this will readily occur. But it should be part of a novelist's ability to be able to halt his narrative at convenient places, and, before going on again, he should deliberately mature or consolidate his gains.

In every kind of life rest is given for, even unconscious, reflection, and the novelist must give his hard-working puppets an occasional interval for digestion. He will do this the more readily if he conceives that his people are embodied ideas, and that an idea has as much right to ripen as a turnip has.

If he still protests that such treatment delays the action of his

story, he should admit, or it should be pointed out to him, that he is an inefficient workman.

Irish Statesman
17 May 1924

Prose Writings: 1926–37

For years Stephens made pronouncements on prose writing: advocating a 'criticism of origins' for literature, insisting that prose could be 'hammered' in the same way as verse, predicting that Irish fiction would reach the level of achievement of Irish drama, viewing writing as 'truth-telling,' and advising writers to work at their craft. By 1926, however, he was complaining to Stephen MacKenna about his capacity to create:

> My own pen has gone rusty. I don't *want* to write any more. Three quarters of all writing anyhow is an indecent exhibition of onesself. Nothing, furthermore, is worth writing about. The French hold that real life is conducted in bed. The English hold that you'r not alive unless you'r committing murder. The Americans say that life is robbery, the Germans that it's work. They are all, without exception, Pigs.
>
> (*Letters*, p. 345)

His books of this period, *Etched in Moonlight* and *Collected Poems*, contain works written in earlier years; *Julia Elizabeth*, despite its publication date of 1929, is a youthful work. What few projects Stephens finished in the period between 1926 and 1937 should not be dismissed, however. The articles on London and the stories concerning St Patrick display the verve and comic grace which made Stephens a gifted speaker. As he lectured to new audiences over the years, his prose – unlike his poetry – became more accessible and inviting of comment. His writings of this time point toward a new, happy career as a radio broadcaster which he began on a regular basis in 1937.

London Woos a Man!

We have heard of distinguished people who have claimed to have a home additional to the one they physically inhabit, and which they like to refer to occasionally as their spiritual home. But we have also observed that those who make such statements do diligently avoid living anywhere except where the flesh dictates. I have heard many conditions of people discussing as to the possible, enchanting spot of the earth's surface upon which they would elect to pitch a final tent, but these honest folk made not a spiritual claim of any kind.

I remember, with pleasure, a gentleman who asserted that beyond the cities of the earth he should like to live in Munich. He gave as a first, tentative reason that Munich was a beautiful city, but assisted this with the substantial declaration that it had beautiful beer. He lamented that he could not live there because the delectable city of Munich was inflicted with inhabitants who spoke what he referred to unsympathetically as a lingo; a lingo which he could not learn, which he would not learn, and in which a person like himself was incapable of discussing anything, including beauty and beer.

There was a lady who – it was upon a Monday – pined to live in Germany for its music. But on Tuesday she elected to stay in Paris on the general count of culture. On Wednesday she decided on Russia and adventures that were temperamentally attuned to her; and on Thursday she protested that food was not eatable and houses were not warm except in America. She shall have trouble wherever she goes. She is a born searcher for a home and is likely to die in the one that her mother died in.

A diplomat has urged me, and with what eagerness, to credit that the one properly habitable city of the globe is Constantinople: and an art critic, enwrapped in a more than beatific enthusiasm, has assured me that not to have been resident in Seville was equivalent to not having been adequately housed at all. Even a poet – and the poet may be defined as one who has no illusions – has confided to his circle that actual felicity requires an ability to reside in Dublin

coupled with a desire to live in Stockholm. How pleasantly the mind could dream of a lady inhabiting a palace in Venice, and whose Titian-tinted hair was inexorably bleaching by reason of her frustrated passion to live in Leeds.

SEDUCTIVE SHOPMEN

London was first extolled to me as a superior habitation by the chance remark of a friend. He closed his eyes for a moment on the sunlit glory of the Dublin hills; a look of contentment impressed his features into that appearance of dense stupidity which is the outward sign of an inward ecstasy, and murmured that the number of places in this world that were not one-tenth as lovely as Tooting ran into prodigious figures. There, he exalted, not even man is vile: and he issued thereupon a laudation of British milkmen and butcher-boys that should be written into the history of England.

In Ireland, he said regretfully, people say thank you if you give them something, but in London they say thank if you take something from them – and that is civilised; that, he continued, is comely and gracious and soothing and unexpected.

He told me tales there, in a rolling, sunsteeped vale, of the distinction that lies between Irish and English business. Here, he submitted, the shopman regards the customer as his enemy and his prey; he seems to say: 'You there; you there with the trousers, buy two ounces of mixed trouser-buttons from me, or I'll blow your brains out'. . . . But in London, he went on, they have a gift of wooing you to acquire things that you would not consent to possess even if you were mad. . . .

A man in Oxford-street, he said, once sold me a tortoise, and I have gone since in terror lest a similar psychological expert should spot me in Bond-street and sell me a giraffe. For they have a perspicuous knowledge of the hidden frailties of man, diagnosing that such an one has an inherited tendency to acquire a bottle of pickles, and that such another can be induced to walk home carrying two gramophone records of La Paloma, each exactly alike to the other, or singular only in that the crack across number one ran from north to south, while the crack that prohibited number two from being anything but an ornament extended from east to west.

THE THREE HERRINGS

A man, he continued, nearly got three and sixpence from me in Hammersmith for a string of pearls that he spread on the pavement and beat lustily upon with a hammer to prove their density and general genuineness. Nothing retrieved me from that purchase but the unexpected discovery that the only part of three and sixpence which I could assemble was one and twopence. . . .

I was fired by these tales of gallant salesmanship, and I lamented that the only person who had ever tried to encircle and seduce me in this manner was a woman who had three herrings left of her original stock and was passionately anxious to be quit of them. My own passionate desire not to have them, I explained –

My friend interrupted me: If that lady had occurred to you in Piccadilly, he said, you should have gone home festooned in herrings. And he rejoiced at a spectacle which I considered lugubrious enough.

Later on I had an adventure with American salesmanship, and came from it with the conviction that it was not so intelligent as British salescraft had been reported to be. As I stepped out of a yellow taxi on to my first (unescorted) New York pavement a man scrutinised me eagerly and then sought to astonish me into the barter of a packet of ladies' garments against five dollars seventy-five – whatever that may be.

Friends in New York to whom I boasted of my unexpected fortitude complimented me heartily; but they met my criticism – advice, rather – as regards salesmanship by the opinion that the individual referred to was probably a foreigner; that he would do better later on, and he was very likely a Britisher.

I did not contest this surmise, realising that every race has a right to its national superstition. But I considered that if the specific person had really been a Londoner he would have perceived and deduced from a hundred occult signs that while I was a person naturally capable of many aberrations, I was also one who would acquire that particular form of trove only at the point of a bayonet.

Evening News (London)
22 December 1927

Trying to Find the Strand

For a long time I knew London as an Underground system whereby one got from Euston to Victoria, and thus to Paris, and I diligently sought to perfect myself in the English language as it was spoken by Undergrounders.

I noticed that my native land had endowed me with many small errors of pronunciation. For example, I said 'twopence' when I should have said 'tuppence,' and when I overheard a man saying 'thrippence' I began to distrust the numerals I was born to, and even to surmise that I might have to learn arithmetic all over again. A taxi-driver to whom I said Maison Lyons in a way that I thought creditable assured me that not only was there no such place in London, but that there couldn't be any such sounding place in the world.

Later on I had to remain in London for a week. I then discovered that, where before I had imagined London to be entirely composed of Undergrounds, it could be exceedingly difficult to find an Underground at all when one was urgently needed.

ONE PLACE I KNEW

I took a ride on a bus. All places were alike to me. Every place was virgin soil. I got something of the sense of London, the mighty city. I had a sense of throng and solidity, of intensity, of wealth and imperturbability which I did not get from Paris, and which I did not get afterwards even from New York.

New York is wonderful indeed. No city in the world is more wonderful, but London is beautiful. The wonder of New York is instantly revealed to its visitor, and is, in an extraordinarily short time, accepted and even forgotten; but the sense of the beauty of London is slow-growing, and abides.

So, going peacefully on my bus I came to a place which I recognised from having seen it on picture postcards and in many

newspapers. It was Trafalgar Square. I dismounted. I felt almost at home.

There is a curious superstition in Dublin that if one has not been in the Strand one has not been in London; that, in fact, the Strand is London; and, consequently, the majority of Irish visitors search for the Strand with the same precipitancy that all lunatics at home are supposed to head for Glen-na-Gelt.

* * *

While I was admiring Trafalgar Square this curious superstition occurred to me. I at once removed a pigeon from my left shoulder and banished its brother from my hat, and I cogitated within me as to how I might get to the famous Strand.

A policeman was standing close to an Underground station, and I asked him my simple question. He looked at me with some of the interest that one might bestow upon an uneatable whelk, and he told me rapidly and concisely how to get there.

My ear was accustomed to the rather slow speech and the low-pitched voices of Ireland; but this policeman's voice was on another pitch altogether; and the tune of his sentence also was different from that to which I was accustomed: his pace of utterance was far more rapid than my ear could allow for – and, as a consequence of all these facts, I had not understood a single word that he had uttered.

I still did not know how to get to the Strand from Trafalgar Square.

MY NINE BUSES

When a sufficiency of traffic had swirled between the policeman and me I got on to another bus, for an idea had struck me. This idea was that a really energetic man can find any place that he is looking for, given the indispensable condition that he is in the town to which that place belongs, and that he has some faith in the law of averages.

Given these, the method of finding a thus unknown place is simplicity itself – one takes a bus and watches the names of the streets it passes through. At the end of five minutes one should leave that bus and take another one that is going in a different or contrary or oblique direction, again watching the streets, and only remaining

in the new bus for five minutes; and one should continue to change his bus and his direction every five minutes until the street he is in need of reveals itself.

This result should normally be achieved inside of twelve buses. If not, the search should be discontinued in that area of the town and taken up on another day in another quarter.

* * *

Leaving Trafalgar Square, I reached the Strand in nine buses, and I was as delighted to get there as Columbus must have been when he raised the Woolworth Building on his port and felt that now he might go home again.

I went home by the Underground station at the end of the Strand, and as I passed down the steps I fancied that the policeman who was on duty there regarded me with interest and affection. I also thought that he looked like the very twin brother of the officer from whom I had sought advice an hour and a half before that.

I thought further that, if I were ever to become a good writer of English, I should live in London and learn the language properly. At tne beginning one is apt to exaggerate the difficulty of any study, but I am inclined to believe now that, on the whole, English is not really as difficult as French.

Evening News (London)
23 December 1927

How St Patrick Saves the Irish

The statement that Englishmen take their pleasures sadly is not borne out by my observations among them. An Englishman to whom I mentioned this admitted that his race was shy, but not sad. He continued that the public schools of Britain, by standardizing the forms of public behaviour, had destroyed the forms of public

happiness. He held that in France, whence the libelous epigram had come, there seemed to be some happiness in the street and none in the house, but that in England the contrary of this was true, and that more merriment would be discovered in any English home in a week than could be elicited from the *chez-soi* of any other nation in a month; Englishmen, he said, live at home; foreigners sleep there.

He contended that more real sadness lay in sight along one acre of American landscape than could be grubbed from the whole width of England, and he was about to expand on this text when he suddenly, unexpectedly, recollected that I am Irish, and accused me of being the saddest man that ever lived, and my nation of being the saddest race in the world. But that he had to catch a heaven-sent bus he might have accused me and it of unimaginable miseries and indescribable turpitudes. There are distinctions. But the person (or nation) of one distinction is apt to be blind to many others. The Frenchman is rational. His ability to be witty may blind him to many other qualities, including that of merriment. And the Englishman, to whom merriment is native, may have neither eye nor ear for the gayety which Ireland loves.

Now of these three – wit, merriment, and gayety – the greatest is gayety; for, like poetry and the chameleon, it can live upon almost nothing, and be the better for its lack. To be witty one must be abominably thoughtful. To be merry one must be exhaustingly comfortable. But to be gay one needs only to be alive.

On the whole, an Irishman's lot should be a happy one. It may be that the number of things which he can enjoy in his own land are severely restricted – and foreigners have been known to assert that there is nothing to enjoy in Ireland except bad weather – but, even if everything else should lack, he can enjoy his own superabundant energy. And, given that he had made peace with this world, he need not (as all other poor nations must) be in any doubt as to his destiny in the world to come. He may thank mythological kings and heroes and deities – his immemorial past, that is – for his energy, but he should render a special gratitude to St Patrick for services given in the second instance, and which he will for a long time give.

This, if the reader will permit, is how it happened:

According to the Irish calendar, the second day of February is the first day of Spring, and it is also the feast day of St Brigid (pronounced Breed).

There has never been a period when a personage of this name was not in Ireland. In very ancient times Brigid was the goddess of

poetry. In less ancient times, by a shocking but logical declension, she became the goddess of war; and in the comparatively recent day which represents the year 1 of this era she became the respected patron of the new religion and the beloved 'Mary of the Gael.'

Poets, soldiers, saints – these are great travellers. By creating, destroying, preserving, they accomplish the work of the world; and, like the Siva of another mythology, our Brigid seems to have been mistress of the three great – the three divine – qualities.

She was travelling in the east of the world and came to an overcrowded little town; and as she went from place to place seeking shelter she came to a stable and went in. A man and a woman were there before her, and the woman was in the pangs of childbirth. It was Brigid who helped her, and it was in Brigid's cloak that the Child was born. Hence she is known as Brigid of the Mantle, as the Foster Mother of Christ and as, after Mary, His Best Beloved.

Then the years rolled on and she went from this world. Then the years surged again, 430 of them, and St Patrick came to Ireland; and then, after the passage of some more years, St Patrick died; but his faith was established in the country that he loved.

The scene of this tale next changes to Heaven itself. Brigid and Patrick were walking together. They were, God help them, talking about Ireland, one asking the other had he or she ever been to Connemara; the other asking the one if she or he remembered the Dingle Peninsula, and how it looked in storm. Or the Ben of Gulbain seen with the moon alight. Or yon basket full of lakes, where each lake dared any other to be as beautiful, and every pool in Ireland lifted the challenge.

Be sure the two saints assured each other, or perhaps even reassured each other, in the faith that, after all, Heaven was prettier than Ireland.

Their walk had been a long one, and, immersed in (as Sean O'Casey would say) darling memories, they had reached a place which the saints care but rarely to visit. They had come to the Seat of Judgment.

There the Judge sat, vaster than Vastness, blacker than Blackness; immovable, unescapable, terrific.

St Brigid did not dislike Rhadamanthus, for that would be a sin. But she did not like him, for he had never been to Ireland nor even had he expressed a desire to go there. As her gaze fell on him and off him a terrible thought caused her to look at him again – at his blank, black vastness, at his super-solid solidity. She saw his great hand

move this way and yon as, like black lightning, he scrutinized this and that being who grovelled and screamed at his awful brow.

'He,' said St Brigid, and she was astounded as she said it, 'he would send even an Irishman to hell!'

'He would,' said St Patrick, but even as he said it he went icy with horror, for the thought had never before struck him.

The Judge looked toward them.

'I will not have it so,' said St Brigid, and she spoke the words, as it were, into that all-sighted, implacable eye.

She drew St Patrick with her away.

They went to her Foster Child and she obtained from Him, who loved her, this concession – that every person who came from Ireland should be judged by St Patrick himself and not by Rhadamanthus.

'You will be very careful,' she said to St Patrick.

'Surely, I will,' the great saint answered.

'But if,' said St Brigid, and the very heart within her was shocked, 'but if a bad Irishman is brought before you – '

'I'll convert him,' said St Patrick.

'Tis but one of the reasons why Irishmen, of whatever religious or political complexion, pledge St Patrick when his day comes round, and why they may all be fearless of the world to come.

But I, an apprentice in the craft that St Patrick loved and of which he was the patron, am desolated to think that perhaps St Brigid is not getting her share of the praise.

Golden Book Magazine
March, 1929
(Also privately printed as a book, 1931)

For St Patrick's Day

St Patrick's first appearance in Ireland followed the course of all the invasions that preceded his. He first attempted to land on the eastern coast, but was repulsed there. Thereupon he sailed to

the north, where he was welcomed. From thence he penetrated southwards, and gradually won the country to his will, for the will of a saint is an inflexible thing and must be bowed to; but the eastern populations of every land are the most stubborn people that live, and even a saint is hard put to win them over.

There are two small fishing villages on the eastern coast of Ireland; they are called Rush and Lusk. It was at the village of Rush that Saint Patrick first tried to land. He did land there, indeed. His dinner even was prepared, and was spread for him on a grassy plot nigh to the shore. But, before the Saint could eat his dinner, the inhabitants of Rush descended from their village, drove the Saint and his escort back to their ship, and then – for to the victor belongs the spoils – the bad men of Rush ate Saint Patrick's dinner. The legend says so.

The Saint's fortune elsewhere in Ireland was too immediate and too bright to permit him bear an unappeasable grudge towards the people of Rush, even though they had repelled him and ate his dinner. But for long generations this little village was famous through the land, and its people were discussed with affectionate astonishment by all the rest of Ireland that had never chased a saint nor pilfered the nourishment of any holy man.

But this talk ceased at last. The men of Rush had been sea-dogs from immemorial time: hard-handed, impatient men who would reply to an ambiguous word or smile with a hammer-like thumping on the lip that ventured to be ambiguous in their neighbourhood. The legend was kept alive only in one place, but that was the most inconvenient place that could be – it was the neighbouring village of Lusk, where also dwelt hard-handed and tarry seamen. And, to this day, any inhabitant of Lusk who feels an imperative need to batter upon or to be battered upon can be immediately obliged if he will merely walk to the next village and make stentorian inquiries there as to who 'ate Saint Patrick's dinner.'

Some small number of years ago there was an uproar at the other end of the world. Away it was, in a remote and but rarely-visited Chinese port. Two small sailing vessels had put into that port. Perhaps flying from a storm. Or they might have been pearl-fishers in those waters. Even, they could have been pirates, if the Chinese seas and a story require such an aid to interest. Whatever they were they were there; their bottoms all barnacled with Chinese barnacles, and now all snug in a Celestial port.

They had not arrived together; and the crew of the first ship had

made the inevitable bee-line for the refreshment that tough and tarry sailormen crave, whether they require it or not. This crew (if tea be deep) was already deep in its tea when the second crew arrived – on the same bee-line, and with the same urgent needs.

There is usually a pause of good manners ere sailors fraternize. Ten minutes may elapse before they smack hearty smacks on hearty backs and bellow on each other to have more tea. During the earlier of these ten minutes they see or perhaps spy one another rising, as it were, on an horizon, and watery space is still heaving between them. Within eight minutes, however, they are within hail, and thereafter the rest is easy, the rolling to each other's board being managed within a minute. So it was with these crews.

The new-comers elaborately ignored the others, and the others returned that compliment. But the new-comers, discussing in whispers as to the refreshment and the quantities of it they intended to be interested in, listened also to the more unrestrained converse of their peers at the other end of the room. As that conversation proceeded the second crew began to steal glances at each other – glances of, at first, unbelief; of, secondly, astonishment; and, at last, of uproarious delight. They first nudged one another as those accents stole on their avid ears; then they heartily punched each other on the knee and, finally, they could no longer contain themselves, but, in the voice of the very thunder itself, they howled: 'Who ate Saint Patrick's dinner?'

Away, as at the ends of the earth, the men of Lusk had coincided with the men from Rush.

In an instant that parcel of China was an uproar. It was a whirl of tough fists on tough jowls. It was a butting and a battering; a heaving and a tumbling; it was every individual one and all of those things that go to make up a row.

Within an hour afterwards both of these crews were squatting on straw in a Chinese dungeon, with their necks manacled to their knees and their tongues hanging out with the drought.

In the morning they were carried before a Chinese Justice – an ancient man, clad all in silk, with a thin beard of the finest silken web, and with gentle, brown eyes that glowed as from delicately-carven ivory. He listened with scrupulous attention to the story as it was elucidated by an army of interpreters, and when it came at last to the stage at which all was comprehensible, the Judge looked on the sailormen with amaze, with speculation, and, finally, with undisguised approval.

'Tell me again,' he said, 'how many years have elapsed since this so-honourable dinner. was abstracted?'

One thousand four hundred and some odd years, he was told.

The Judge then addressed the Court.

He began by extolling the ancestors; he continued by glorifying Saint Patrick, and he concluded by praising the men of Rush and Lusk. He pointed out that, although of antagonistic parties, nine of the men concerned bore the very name of the ancestor himself. That the men of Lusk had fought to commemorate the pilfering of the ancestor's dinner. That the men of Rush had denied in the Court itself, and with the customary ceremonial oaths, that the honourable-dinner had ever been stolen by their pious forefathers, and they had each personally professed a boundless affection for the ancestor. That the story of these poor men faithfully reverencing the ancestor even after the lapse of nigh fifteen hundred years, was one that should be an example to the youth of China, where, when a paltry century or two had passed away, the very name of an ancestor was unremembered and unextolled. He dismissed the case against the sailors, directing that the Court, aided by a public subscription, should bear the costs of the prosecution and the damages done to the town, and he presented to the Master of each ship a cask of tea, and he imparted to both these Masters his blessing and his compliments. Thus it was, and should be.

Radio Times
9 March 1928

A Poetry Reading with Comments*

A great deal of poetry is a dull matter, and we cannot avoid that, but there is what I call interest, and if you can be interested in the whole of a thing you can get over the dullness, and therefore you might transfer your interest from the making of poetry to the speech of it.

* From a Reading by James Stephens at the Writer's Club

We are beginning to think that there lies a connection between poetry and prose. Wordsworth thought that, if he could vulgarize the language of poetry, he could again etherealize the meaning, but it cannot be done that way. You hear, now and then, advice given the young actor that he should be natural. That is pernicious – so for a writer – he should not try to be natural; he should strive to attain the simplicity that lies within his own subject. The young actor is told that he should walk and speak the same as if he were in a drawing room; but he is not in a drawing room, he is acting. He is, as it were, on stilts, and if he dares to walk naturally, to sit down naturally, he is not walking or sitting as an artist, and if he utters words as he would do in a drawing room he is not acting but merely talking. There is a distinction – that distinction – in every art. If you put prose into poetry, it is still prose.

I think it is a matter of pace, that there is one pace which is within the scope of poetry and another which is within the scope of prose. If we go very slowly or very fast it must be in poetry, and so when we tackle any of the various speeds except that of the pedestrian, which is prose. Prose cannot attempt a pace beyond that of its norm or it becomes the hysteria of writing. With those who now and then attempt the purple passage in prose, it is often something stiff or shoddy that they put the purple on.

It used to be fashionable to define your terms; but it must be done again for each generation. There are two or three ways in which you can conceive of poetry. We can take it up and say that it is near what we call speech. But there is in speech a balance, and when we go far enough the balance is upset, and there is rhythm, and when that is pushed far enough again the circle is complete and we are back to what is apparently a prose utterance and then we have speech which we call epic; and just as in a lyric mood, a prose rhythm is hateful, so in epics a lyric mood is hateful.

The first kind of speech verse is descriptive. It is not seeking an utterance that arrives at finality. Second, there is the poetry of balance, producing a feeling that elucidates the meaning more than the word. That which we call song is third, and the fourth or epic utterance, is beyond description. I sometimes think that in heaven when a cherub speaks in verse, that is lyrical verse, and when an archangel speaks, he issues hexameter; but when the Lord himself talks, he talks in plain prose. When material is put down so that it is understandable then work on it is commenced. Then the artist can make it elegant, if it needs that, or if powerful he can work it to the extreme of power it can hold.

One can very easily fall in love with prose, and love it more than verse. Prose is a more difficult art form than verse. When you lean on the spirit of it, poetry carries you; but in prose you have to walk every step, every foot of the way and rely upon your own thought. Therefore it is much more difficult to write good prose than good verse. In verse the subject itself has a mood belonging with it. The subject has a technique, which is not true of prose, because every verse of poetry has to be quarried from a reluctant granite. There is this to be said of a poem; that is if you are in doubt as whether it is a poem or merely prose in verse form. If it is possible to justify changing the utterance of a descriptive poem by leaving one word out of it or adding one to it, it is a bad poem.

Any time I see a full stop in a verse I feel outraged. You can have as many commas, colons, and semicolons, as many dashes and asterisks and any kind of junk like that, as you please, but on condition you do not come to a full stop. A stanza from the first to the last word should be a continuous utterance and should be uttered on one breath, at least one should have the illusion that this is being done.

All the sounds in a poem should be sounded, and the pauses should be brought out and dwelt upon; and the meaning and the structure should be emphasized.

I shall recite a poem about a cat, which is in that mode neighbouring on speech. You see there is no means whereby the varied activity of a cat could be brought into the sequestration of words. Behind the word stands the total mind. It is the entire total of a life that cannot be squeezed into words. Any poem that is uttered is a magical act. There is only the understanding that exists between the speaker and the hearer, and the one who understands Shakespeare is as truly a creative participator in the effort as is Shakespeare. The approach to a cat being via life, we must take it psychically. A cat, a flower, a bird is a human being and has to be spoken of as a human being. If you look at these animals really, you will find that there is no difference. A cow or a cockroach has come into this world exactly as you have, and they get food when they are hungry, as you do, and get content or get sad or get anything else the same as you do, and life is behaving the same for a blade of grass as for a man. The cat is supposed to be talking.

> I walked out in my Coat of Pride
> I looked about on every side,

And said the mountains should not be
Just where they were, and that the sea
Was out of place, and that the beech
Should be an oak – And then from each
I turned in dignity as if
They were not there: I sniffed a sniff,
And climbed upon my sunny shelf,
And sneezed a while, and scratched myself.

May I say still a few poems in this mode of speech. These two are about girls. When a girl walks into a poem she has ceased to be *his* girl, and has become everybody's girl. And it is not so easy to get a girl into a poem as the uninitiated would think. These girls are very rapid and consequently the poet cannot get the poem to catch up with them, they are elusive and are gone. So he looks about and tries to find a certain tranquillity of the past and writes about Cleopatra or some other long dead and gone lady, and 'my girl' reads it and applies it to herself. But if he is so unlucky as to write of his real girl she does not think that he has chosen just the proper adjective to describe her, while if he writes about Cleopatra and dedicates it to 'her,' he has safeguarded himself from criticism of that sort. The girls in Ireland loved their poetry and tried to live up to what the poems said about them. Any girl will do that. Why, I believe if you were to write a poem and put a girl in it and make a very good poem about that girl, she would become that poem. When Rossetti drew girls with long necks it was no time at all until the girls had long necks. Sure, within five years all the ladies were long and thin.

Well, a poet met a young lady and his statement is that she is infinitely variable; that she is very lovable, and at times very hateful. There should be a polarity and a flux in a poem. The poem that simply states the thing it is telling, – uttering, is no poem at all.

As lily grows up easily,
In modest, gentle, dignity,
To sweet perfection,
So grew she,
As easily.

. . . .

She is our torment without end,
She is our enemy, our friend,

Our joy, our woe;
And she will send
Madness or glee
To you or me,
And endlessly.

Now there is another girl and quite a different type of girl. The poet was going along the road and he went into a public house (something which you wouldn't understand at all in this country) and there was this girl and when he told her what he wanted in a way of a soothing liquid he was asked 'Have you any money?'

The lanky hank of a she in the inn over there
Nearly killed me for asking the loan of a glass of beer:
May the devil grip the whey-faced slut by the hair,
And beat bad manners out of her skin for a year.

MS
May, 1933

The Passing of 'A.E.'

'A.E.' is dead. To populations of other lands that news will merely come as news. They will say, each in his idiom – A person has removed from this life to this life again: or – In the rounding of the wheel such a one has disappeared, and will reappear when the time comes. But they will not say, with a sense of unexpected calamity – 'A.E.' is dead.

He was a unique person. As with certain poets – Blake, Shelley, Hopkins – the question of their being major or minor does not arise: they are unique, and are stable in that disconnection. So it is with George Russell: and the question of his being a great man does not arise. He was a unique being; acting as from himself in every circumstance: and an eager answerer to questions.

As we grow older the importance, the romance, of being 'great' is considerably lessened; even we begin to surmise that every great

man was a great pest, and that, except to children, one good man is preferable to a hundred great ones.

* * *

Looking back twenty years to a first meeting with him, one asks, What was the immediately outstanding and continuously appreciable quality of 'A.E.'? and one answers that he was tireless: that his mind was incapable of being fatigued.

One may easily be tiresome by being tireless, and to souls of a lesser vitality such a man could be exhausting. But the volcano beamed. There radiated from him, not, or rarely, an expression of, but a sense of easy, simple affection for the interlocutor, and this minimised the distinction in their several qualities, and induced fatigue to refrain from energising itself as anger or discontent. Mainly we are only bored in two circumstances. When we meet a slower mind than our own, or a faster. Both extremes are complete boredoms to a person standing in the mid of them; and, in general, we have a right to evade the one, who horrifies us as our immediate past, and the other, who terrifies us as our inescapable future.

* * *

'A.E.'s' vast energy – and a vaster I have not known – seemed as self-subsisting as though it were nourished at concealed fountains, or refreshed on nothing but the mere sleep which, like others, he had to take each night. He awakened as a conversationalist, and he conversed mightily until he slept again. Intervals occurred, and within these he wrote an interminable prose, often filling the entire issue of the weekly review he edited. Still, he could contrive or create other intervals (one cannot imagine how), and, within these, he composed so continuous, so voluminous, a poetry that it alone might be considered as the huge life-work of an exceptionally energetic man.

* * *

Nor does the tale end here. He painted and disposed of many thousands of pictures – the total of pictures painted by 'A.E.' must

be a huge one. He yet had time not only to be visited by all his friends, and he had many, but to be the completely-to-be-depended-upon visitor at all his friends' houses or rooms.

All that he was able to do he loved to do, and he was never idle. Rodin has said that the one rule for the artist is that he must always be at work. 'A.E.' would have commended Rodin's law, and might have held that there is no other artistic rule.

* * *

'A.E.' has told me that he was not originally robust physically or intellectually, nor of a fundamentally decided character, nor of an especially psychic nature. That he made himself over from very little by a gradually increasing interest in and application of the thought and methods of the Vedanta. He held that to meditate the ideas of the Bhagavad Gita and to practise the psychological discipline systematised by Pantanjali must astonishingly energise any person, and that these ideas and this discipline had transformed him from a shy youth to the cheerful, courageous personage he certainly became.

* * *

He had many talents. In a diversity of talents a certain toll is exacted by each from each. They form a family, and must pool their resources, and seek, each, for its place in the sun. Something is noticed, finally, as having been cumbered, how little soever, by the necessities of the other talents. 'A.E.' might have been known as the finest prose-writer of our day. Additional to being a very rare artist, he could have been a sounder, a more resourceful painter. His poetry, as well as being lovely, might have been of greater variety in mood and subject. His political activities, supplementary to being packed with lifegiving ideas, might have been pointed, hardened, made unavoidable, and, practically as well as ideally rendered effective. He was busier than any one man ever ought to be, but he enjoyed that. He hurt none, he helped and encouraged many, and he gave of himself unsparingly in every direction from which such demand might come.

* * *

The future will certainly take heed of 'A.E.'s' pictures, if for no other reason than that they are too strange, too gay, too awkward, and too innocent to be overlooked, or willingly forgotten. But it is mainly to his poetry that critical interest will be directed.

If Yeats is the greatest poet in the English language, Russell is the next in that splendid succession. There are matters, indeed, to disconcert one in his verse. Very early in his career he discovered his own idiom, and, in both prose and verse, he abundantly overused it. This is the more singular in that he was a most acute critic, and, regarding the work of other artists, he could unerringly discern in their verse the intrusion of private idiom, or the growth of a personal cliché.

More grave is the fact that he wished, directly or by implication, to write only about God, and this is not the poet's business, nor his privilege. To be a poet and to be, even thus augustly, restricted, is to be the poet hampered, the poet of only one wing.

* * *

But, when all that can be urged against his muse has been permitted, there remains a poesy completely his own: unlike any other verse whatever, and perfectly satisfying to the rare and rarely-informed reader who is capable of entering his Inane. Some ten days before his death he read me the proofs of his, shortly forthcoming, Selected Poems. Every page of this book is lovely: and every page of it affirms 'A.E.' as the other one of the two great poets of our time.

Observer
21 July 1935

Prose Writings: 1938–48

In a letter dated 1941, Stephens complained to his friend, the writer E. R. Eddison:

> But some old how I can't get down to real reading, or real writing for that matter, in these dull days. I write only those fifteen minute jaw-scraps for broadcasting, & there is no health in them. It is a new Journalism, & I think one airs oneself at some peril.
>
> (*Letters*, p. 412)

Actually, the broadcasts over the BBC were well received, and the scripts which were published in the *Listener* reveal an engaging conversationalist at his best. Furthermore, Stephens must have enjoyed the task of producing the radio programmes because during the years of the Second World War, he commuted to London from Gloucestershire in order to give his talks.

Writing about writers was a life-long occupation, and in many of his commentaries, he examined figures he had known or read deeply. It was a sad task when the writers were friends who had died, as his touching tributes to A.E. and W. B. Yeats testify. The commentary on Yeats contains 'a curious belief' that a person, and in particular an artist, does not die until 'his or her value has been extracted by his life and time.' Perhaps this thought consoled him for two losses: his friends who were gone and his artistic career which was ending. Illness and old age were major contributory factors to the cessation of Stephens' craft; he was exhausted and could write little more.

His last prose writings find Stephens commenting on the familiar topics of his native country and his craft. His views on Ireland and England in the piece on Thomas Moore are consistent with his earlier stance: he was always a sympathetic, not a strident nationalist. His remark in discussing Chesterton, that 'twenty or more years will pass before criticism decides to take another look' at a writer after he dies could well be applied to himself. Some twenty years after his death, on St Stephen's Day, 26 December 1950, critics began to take another look; since that time, they have found

much to admire in his comic, bold, thoughtful works of prose. James Stephens left behind a lifetime of writing which deserves to be remembered because it is an affirmation – of humanity, of joy, and of love.

Thomas Moore: Champion Minor Poet

Every poet is a minor poet; some of them are minor all the time, others are not. These others have their moments off from the minorness of verse, and we remember them in these moments with love, and indeed, with astonishment. When one is asked to talk about Thomas Moore the question of the minor poet arises, almost in majesty. He had lived so long, written so much, been adored so universally, and been such a good chap through every moment of that living, writing and adoring, that one dislikes to question his credentials. He seemed such a champion in his time. He was a wit, a satirist, a romantic, a patriot, a musician, and a lover: and he was all these in such astonishing abundance, and with such readiness to oblige, as only a champion can manage. He is the champion minor poet of us all. Poetry can become a habit, and every habit is a bad habit. A habit is an aptitude which saves us from hard work, and if you succeed in dodging hard work in verse, well, you have also succeeded in dodging poetry. There is, of course, great ease in good poetry, but it takes much hard work to make tough poetry seem light as gossamer, and airier than air. Light verse, on the other hand, gets a bit weightier per annum, and at last it is very little lighter than lead.

CURIOSITY – INTEREST – LOVE

Any talk of Irish poetry must, of necessity, bring England into the matter. That there was distress between these nations need not now be stressed. Lack of sympathetic curiosity accounts for a large part of this trouble; and indeed it accounts for a large part of all human trouble whatever. On the whole we are not sufficiently curious about each other. If we were really capable of curiosity we should be really civilised beings, and we would take a great deal more care of

each other than we do. Curiosity is interest. Interest, carried far enough, is love. There is, in truth, no interest except where affection is. English was my first language, but when I was about twenty I was learning Irish as everyone else was. Shortly after that again I began to interest myself in English as a literature, and actually began to write in it. Then I became aware that we in Ireland were in possession of two English literatures. One of these was made in England and was the 'Chaucer to Tennyson' so justly world-famous. The other literature, in English, was made in Ireland, and was only known to Irish people. I sometimes think that no English person has ever been sufficiently curious to read our Anglo-Irish literature and to learn something about us from it. It is a relatively large literature, for we had our own novelists and dramatists, and, in especial, we had our own poets.

Irish poetry is mainly a poetry of distress and anger and helplessness. This poetic contribution in English was curiously beloved by our people, even by our common people; and, with religion, its possession was our only culture. The common people of other lands are rarely interested in the poetry of their country. They leave poetry, as one might say, to their 'betters,' for poetry is always the gift and the pleasure of an *élite* in whatever nation. But I think that every grown person in Ireland knew by heart many poems, and was always ready to listen to many others, and to discuss, in terms of personal liking, the merits of dozens of verse-makers. Our poetry was 'popular' poetry, and all the above is a kind of apology for it. The work of a poet in a dejected nation is very important to the nation, but it is *not* very poetical, for the poet is given a practical job of work to do, and while we do not know what the work of poetry is we do know that it is not 'practical.' A country is in a pretty serious condition when its poetry has to become national; when it has to become, that is, political and angry and defensive. The poets of such a country are almost prohibited from producing poetry. They have to produce instead the anger or the discomfort of the day.

Properly speaking, poetry has no subject, and when it is forced to have a subject poetry becomes rhymed journalism. The 'subjects' of real poetry are the commonplaces – nature and beauty and God. These belong to every country and to every man, and they are commonplaces because they are universal: but when nature becomes one's country, when beauty becomes one's violence, when God becomes one's defensive religion, poetry does not know what to do about it and has to do just whatever it can.

AMONG 'THE GODS'

When I was a youngster scarcely a week passed without our hearing someone recite or sing some of Moore's poems. He was never spoken of as Thomas Moore: he was always referred to as Tommy. Every person, of whatever sex, who could tap with one finger on a piano, tapped out Donizetti and Tommy Moore, and Puccini and Tommy Moore. Everyone who could sing, or would sing, sang Tommy Moore. He was among 'the gods' – and that is where no respectable poet should ever be. Young people of my age began to wonder whether Tommy was the world's greatest poet or the world's greatest bore. Alas, when one is young, a bore is adequately described as whatever it may be that your uncle and your aunt love most. That questioning by the younger generation is the hyena that dogs popularity, and that one day drags it down. It is often enough unjust, but every generation must turn in self-defence from the too-great popularity of a Moore, a Byron or a Tennyson: and, again in self-defence, we are forced to forget what is noble and lasting in our artists, and to remember only that which is trivial, and of their age. Prose may properly be of its age, but poetry 'dates' at its peril.

Moore did a curious work for the Ireland of his day. He introduced her, in bare feet and a red petticoat, to the drawing-room and the boudoir. He made her romantic, but also he made her feel as not quite neglected in the world or by the world. Lord Byron and Shelley liked him personally, and Byron, at least, approved his poetry: also, Moore was simply and instinctively very proud of his country, and even in head-turning popularity he never let his country down. Perhaps he was a minor poet, but he was a good poet and a likeable man. Much of Moore's poetry (and there is too much of it) is now unreadable, even by Irishmen, but there is still an amount which can withstand our hypercritical modernity. It also happens that we possess a treasury of folk-music which is as abundant and as lovely as any music anywhere. This, and a very curious native mythology are what Ireland has, and, in a sense, they are all that she has. Moore was a passably good musician, and he put words to some hundred of our tunes. His words are not as good as the tunes he put them to, but he did spread widely a knowledge of our music, and he did help his country in doing this.

Curiously enough he also set verses to many foreign tunes. Here is a poem he made to an Indian tune. The form and the sentiment are at one pessimistic and lovely. This is one of his best poems:

All that's bright must fade,
    The brightest still the fleetest;
All that's sweet was made
    But to be lost when sweetest.

Stars that shine and fall;
    The flower that drops in springing;
These, alas! are types of all
    To which our hearts are clinging.

All that's bright must fade,
    The brightest still the fleetest;
All that's sweet was made
    But to be lost when sweetest.

Who would seek or prize
    Delights that end in aching?
Who would trust to ties
    That every hour are breaking?

Better far to be
    In utter darkness lying,
Than to be bless'd with light and see
    That light for ever flying.

All that's bright must fade,
    The brightest still the fleetest;
All that's sweet was made
    But to be lost when sweetest!

Listener
8 June 1944

The 'Period Talent' of G. K. Chesterton

A very strange thing happens when a writer dies. The strange thing is that his books tend to die with him. A month after his death his name is not mentioned again, for he is no longer in competition with the living, and twenty or more years will pass before criticism decides to take another look at him and his work and try to discover if there was a real person there, or only a living gramophone record engraved and wound up by his period. Shakespeare's poetry was dead for nearly two hundred years, and then, and only as by chance, it came to life again. This fact alone is a truly remarkable criticism on the generations that succeeded the Elizabethan Age.

It is, so, impossible to talk about Chesterton by himself. One reason is that he and his period are dead. The great majority of modern writers, of writers in general, do not, of course, exist by themselves. They live with their own crowd: they are enwrapped in each other and in their period; they were born and they got married and they died. What does all this matter? They have scarcely any life of their own, and they are moved, from day to day and from book to book, by the daily happening and the daily acquaintance. They write in their crowd. They live in their crowd, and they die there.

G. K. Chesterton died only ten years ago: but subsequent events have so arranged it that those ten years ago are already fifty years away. He left a vast body of work behind him, both in prose and verse. There are a great many writers who consider that only by writing hundreds of books can they write against time and leave behind them the relative immortality which the French call '*La Gloire*' and we call 'Greatness.' Before Chesterton died there were a certain number of writers, but three in especial, about whom a curious but true thing is to be said. I am not now referring to the *great* writers, to, that is, Meredith and Hardy, Kipling and Moore and Yeats. The three I have in mind are Wells and Shaw and

Chesterton. The thing to be said of these three is that every person of some cultivation who used the English language as a native language had come under the influence of these three writers, and recognised these three as the popular masters of their epoch, and as the guiding and energising influences of their day. It is impossible to speak of one of these three without taking the others into account, for between them they summarise their epoch, and it is impossible not to recognise the enormous liberating and fertilising world-influence of their work.

A question that must arise is, were these the greatest writers of their time? They were not. Popular acclaim is rarely given to the great writers of a period, but these three were the greatest public influences of their day, and their influence has not ceased to this day. The way in which the great writers differs from all his companions is that he is *not* a journalist, and the three I speak of were journalistic both in talent and in production. The talent of Wells and Shaw and Chesterton was, too, largely a period talent – it was more than that, but it was also that – they wrote eagerly, even angrily, the idea of the day: they wrote of the good, the bad, and the indifferent which the day and its newspaper brought them. But of human beings, of human intentions, they almost never wrote. Of the thing we call 'living' they had almost no experience: of the thing we call 'thinking' they thought in bulks of national and international exchanges. Of the person-in-himself, who is everywhere the poet and the religious, they had no experience and almost a deep dislike. Of the poetry which is the sole and lasting glory of England, Wells and Shaw took no account, and of the thing which we call 'passion' they took little account either: indeed they replaced it with anger and humour and violence and a perpetual change for the sake of change. Change! We call it Science! There is scarcely room to blame them for this, for their whole life was passed in a world that changed from year to year, and their work is a wonderful notation of this change. They saw money change, and sex change, and speed change, and a change in any one of these is revolution indeed. They saw money become valueless, sex become promiscuous, and speed become monstrous.

In all this Chesterton was different from the others, although not greater. He did seek the solitude of religion – he became a Catholic, but he could not abide that solitude, or any solitude: he did seek the solitude of poetry, but he could not abide being alone with Urania. He did not know that poetry is a very private matter and is only

communion with others by their merit, and by their identity with the solitary song. All poetry that is widely and immediately acceptable is a peasant poetry, and is almost a parody of everything that poetry intends and promises. For poetry intends your freedom, and promises you beauty.

Chesterton's poetry is shown at his best, or at his greatest reach, in 'Lepanto.' This poem evokes most interesting and even strange reflections. It is cast in the ballad-form, but, where every native reader can immediately understand an English ballad, only a scholar, and a Catholic scholar at that, can get the very remarkable poem which Chesterton put such an immensity of work into. This is the only English poem I know which is not English. Every English poem exists by reason of the under-song which is inseparable from English verse. This poem is, in fact, the only French poem in the English language, and in it the under-song that I speak of has been replaced by that amazing French quality which is called eloquence, and which, while it can be superb, can also be a pestilence and a blight to poetry.

In English or in French how remarkable this quality is! It can often be wonderful: but you don't go to bed with it. One goes to bed with the moon, and with poetry, but you don't go to bed with eloquence – in these two stanzas* Chesterton is indeed magnificent:

White founts falling in the courts of the sun,
And the Soldan of Byzantium is smiling as they run;
There is laughter like the fountains in that face of all men feared,
It stirs the forest darkness, the därkness of his beard,
It curls the blood-red crescent, the crescent of his lips,
For the inmost sea of all the earth is shaken with his ships.
They have dared the white republics up the capes of Italy,
They have dashed the Adriatic round the Lion of the Sea,
And the Pope has cast his arms abroad for agony and loss,
And called the kings of Christendom for swords about the Cross,
The cold queen of England is looking in the glass;
The shadow of the Valois is yawning at the Mass;
From the evening isles fantastical rings faint the Spanish gun,
And the Lord upon the Golden Horn is laughing in the sun.

* Taken from G. K. Chesterton's *Collected Poems* (Burns, Oates and Washbourne)

Dim drums throbbing, in the hills half heard,
Where only on a nameless throne a crownless prince has stirred,
Where, risen from a doubtful seat and half attainted stall,
The last knight of Europe takes weapons from the wall,
The last and lingering troubadour to whom the bird has sung,
That once went singing southward when all the world was young,
In that enormous silence, tiny and unafraid,
Comes up along a winding road the noise of the Crusade.
Strong gongs groaning as the guns boom far,
Don John of Austria is going to the war,
Stiff flags straining in the night-blasts cold
In the gloom black-purple, in the glint old-gold,
Torchlight crimson on the copper kettle-drums,
Then the tuckets, then the trumpets, then the cannon, and he comes.
Don John laughing in the brave beard curled,
Spurning of his stirrups like the thrones of all the world,
Holding his head up for a flag of all the free.
Love-light of Spain – hurrah!
Death-light of Africa!
Don John of Austria
Is riding to the sea.

Chesterton was a divided man – he wished to be a successful and voluminous writer, and he was that: he also wished to be the solitary, the poet, the religious, and he made as desperate an attempt to be a poet and a saint as any man has ever made. But how can the impatient writer ever become a writer? How can the poet-in-a-hurry ever come on the intense quietude which makes of itself the wing, the singer, and the song? Or how can the practice of the presence of God be written, as it were, daily for a newspaper? He was in his crowd.

Chesterton used to publish books at the rate of six or seven a year. He was a critic of anything and everything; he was a daily journalist: he would write you, at a moment's notice, the biography of anyone you asked for: he would throw off a couple of novels in his spare time: he would write so many short stories that you couldn't count them – they were excellent short stories: he would engage in written controversy with anyone on almost anything: he was a political and social theorist, and a public lecturer, and he would throw off at any moment a couple of dozen poems if he thought that

would please the neighbour. He was not dishonest in this, nor even wrong. He did please everyone, I think, and he was truly a most pleasant person. He was of an unshakeable kindness. He was modest in despite of popularity. He was willing to work himself to death if that would help anyone. He would give, I think, up to the very limit of his possessions to whomever or whatever was in need. He was a good and a gallant man and writer. He knew that something was all wrong in his age, that the values had departed and that everything was at odds and at stake, so he went political, and, like Mr Gandhi, he proposed that we should retreat some hundreds of years into the Middle Ages, or even further back into the Dark Ages, and that we should all become glorious peasants again and live happily ever afterwards. Perhaps that will happen, and perhaps the revolution in money and sex and speed will see that it does happen.

Meanwhile, Chesterton and his companions of the pen put all the blame on the immediate past. They had inherited the oddest legacy of hate that has been bequeathed from one generation to another. They were all devoted to the total destruction of something or other which they referred to as the Victorian Age. They declared war against Victorian comfort, Victorian complacency, Victorian morals, Victorian customs, against anything and everything which would be thought of as Victorian, and they have helped lead us to where there aren't any customs left to us, very little of morals that one can recognise, and nothing of comfort in being or in prospect. The growth of violence in the years I speak of is very strange and is truly the remarkable fact of the past age. Under the term 'detective-story,' literature was a continuous and vast tale of murder, sex, theft and treachery. In every country these matters were the favourite writing and the favourite reading, these were the universal day-dreams, and when the 1914 Great War arrived every land was already soaked in the idea of sensuality and robbery and slaughter. For our 'popular' writers always see to it that their people are psychologists ready for any abomination that can arrive, and they are not neglecting that duty now.

Listener
17 October 1946

W. B. Yeats: a Tribute

It is a curious belief of mine (all beliefs are curious, for they all outrun the constable) that a person rarely dies until his or her value has been extracted by his life and his time. Byron, Shelley, Keats all died young. I do not believe that any of these had one single present more to give to poetry. Their work had been abstracted, and all they could have added to it would have been mere recapitulation, and that artistic boredom which is more boring than anything else can be.

Indeed, a commonplace poem (and are there some?) seems to be more tiresome than anything else in life. 'Commonplace' is the wrong word, for what can we love better than it? Air, water, fire; birth and love and service: only the commonplace is lovable, but dull poetry is just dull, and is, even singularly detestable – there are millions of miles of it.

OLDER AND BETTER

Keats might have become a better chemist, he could not have become a better poet. Shelley could have matured into a more diligent husband and father, but not into a greater lyricist. Byron had not more to do in life following the almost immeasurable lot that he had done: he might have been forced to elect to commit suicide 'upon the midnight with no pain.'

Except perhaps in the spiritual life, 'to grow old and bad' is the general physical, intellectual and artistic fact and progress.

But, now and again, miraculously there comes the odd person who seems to grow better in his art as he grows older – Verdi, Beethoven, Titian, Yeats. These, and a few others, seemed to be bettering themselves with age. Yeats died not artistically exhausted. His last volume of verse is not wearisome, and there is in it much to surprise and reward the amateur of his singular art. All that is original is singular. There is in his verse much anger, and some

peace: much dubiety, and some certitude: much of man and woman, and something of God. He liked human beings, without loving them: perhaps he approved of God also without loving Him. He liked ideas better than the things that uphold them. Of love and passion he preferred the latter: of religion and magic he preferred the latter also.

If one were asked to name the greatest poetic figures of his time, it could, temporarily be considered that Gerard Hopkins and W. B. Yeats were the most striking workers that our art has produced. That both of these were 'original' artists, both were oddly self-centred, and perhaps self-deluding, and that both of these had again a dualism or polarity not quite digested into the matter. 'Love's eunuch,' said one, and the other didn't not say it.

One could inquire did they really prefer poetry to syntax, or the other way about. This is a very curious demi-mania, and it mainly affects those artists whom we think of as 'classical': rarely does it obtrude into the work of those whom we think of as 'romantic.' The classicists are almost foreigners to the English language, or are in some sense a little apart, and even a little astray in it. They touch the mind more immediately than they touch the heart.

There are two Yeatses, and to be these the poet had to work like a navvy or a hack. He was a poet, and he was a dramatist. Generally, in lyrical poetry especially, the matter seems to come almost as though it had been 'given.' This was not so with Yeats. He had to work very hard to get his poem. Nearly always he had to write that poem again a few years afterwards: but, finally, he got it. There was a delayed knowledge in his mind. The back of his mind was not satisfied, and it harried him and worried him, so that he had to do it again and again, but at the last he got it.

I do not think that he really got his poem 'Byzantium.' He wrote it twice, excellent verse indeed, but I do not believe that, had he lived another 20 years, he would have been able to write it. Away in the back of his head he *knew* of it, but he could not bring it forward. It is strange to recognise a something and thereupon to be unable to express it. Milton could not express God the Father or God the Son. These remoted themselves from his mind, as they did from the mind of Hopkins, and the mind of Yeats. There is, as Nietzsche says, 'being human, too human.'

EPITAPH

Alas! Towards the end of his life Yeats wrote his own epitaph: –

A most astonishing thing –
Seventy years have I lived;
(Hurrah for the flowers of Spring,
For Spring is here again.)
Seventy years I have lived
No ragged beggar-man,
Seventy years have I lived.
Seventy years, man and boy,
And never have I danced for joy.

Was he the greatest poet, and greatest poetic-dramatist in English of our time? I don't know, but he was the greatest poet that Ireland has produced in the English language. He has gone home to his country, and to his deep sleep at last. Said he to a friend – 'What is the happiest moment of a happy day?' And his friend answered – 'It is the moment when you go to sleep that night, and forget it.'

Observer
19 September 1948

Two Plays: 1920 and 1929

Setting aside amateur acrobatics when he assumed the roles of husband and father, Stephens took up a new avocation which was equally gratifying and only slightly less hazardous – acting. In 1909 he appeared several times in Seumas O'Kelly's play, *The Shuiler's Child*. One year later, he played three roles in a production of Gerald Macnamara's *The Spurious Sovereign*. He acted in a Gaelic play, *Bairbre Ruadh*, by Padraic O Conaire in 1911, and was invited to return to *The Shuiler's Child* in a new production in 1913. Although his stage roles were few, he retained his ability to delight audiences when he lectured on tours and on radio, and from all accounts the attraction was mutual – he loved his audiences as much as they loved him.

Stephens completed two plays, *Julia Elizabeth* and *The Demi-Gods*. He began at least two others, called *Caprice* and *The Snowball*; worked on a scenario for a theatrical version of his first novel; began a movie scenario for the saga material he used in his last two novels; and wrote a comic skit, 'The Microbe Play,' which was performed by actor-friends.

Julia Elizabeth's popularity with Dublin may explain its several reworkings. Under the title, *The Marriage of Julia Elizabeth*, the play was first performed on 17–18 November 1911 by the Theatre of Ireland Company; it was also produced on 26–8 June 1913 as part of a charity show at the Hardwicke Street Theatre. Another version, *The Wooing of Julia Elizabeth*, was presented from 31 May to 5 June 1920 at the Abbey Theatre. First on a theatrical bill with *Eloquent Dempsey*, the Stephens play was continued by popular demand as an added attraction to the next Abbey programme, *Arms and the Man*. It was then seen as part of a variety show at the Empire Theatre.

Julia Elizabeth has a slim plot, but its quirky characters endear themselves by their very excesses of behaviour. The battles between husband and wife are linked to the quarrels found in *The Crock of Gold* and *The Demi-Gods*; and the wayward Julia is a forerunner of the highly independent heroines of those novels, Caitilin Ni Murrachu and Mary Mac Cann. One comic allusion should not pass unnoticed: the first name of the young 'playboy' who successfully woos Julia Elizabeth away from her more staid suitor is 'Christie.'

The Times' review of 1 June 1920 claimed with some glee that the play was 'merely a trifle, just a concoction that a chef like Mr Stephens would impishly delight in sending to the tables of the literati'. Audiences enjoyed the play immensely; and so, apparently, did Stephens, for he rewrote *The Marriage of Julia Elizabeth* as a short story and included it, as the first part of 'Three Lovers Who lost', in *Here Are Ladies*.

While Stephens had taken a play, *Julia Elizabeth*, and reworked it as a short story, he followed the reverse process for his other drama, *The Demi-Gods*. This play was an adaptation, made several years later, of his third novel. The two plays are totally dissimilar. *Julia Elizabeth* is a modest, one-set, three-character comedy, easily adaptable to an amateur company. *The Demi-Gods* is a three-act drama with ten characters and six settings. The roles require professionally-trained actors, and the production would be expensive. *Julia Elizabeth* was produced several times; *The Demi-Gods* has not ever been presented. The version of *The Demi-Gods* reproduced in this edition was edited by Richard Finneran from a typescript with holograph corrections in the possession of Iris Wise, James Stephens' stepdaughter. In addition to incorporating Stephens' holograph corrections, Professor Finneran regularized stage directions and indications of exits and entrances; he also revised the typescript by reference to a holograph manuscript in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library. The typescript, which is dated 1 August 1920, was printed in the September 1975 issue of the *Journal of Irish Literature*.

Despite the lack of attention paid to it in Stephens' lifetime and since, *The Demi-Gods* is an important part of his literary history, and hardly a dull play. Like the novel on which it is based, it combines fantasy and reality, high spirits and serious thought, in its story of the adventures of three angels who travel the Irish countryside with a tinker, his daughter, and his sometime sweetheart. The play explores four subjects which are exemplary of Stephens' themes throughout his prose: the union of gods and mortals in a magical Irish setting; the emotional sterility of the lives of the rich in contrast to the energetic gaiety of those who live by their wits; the struggle between a maturing child and a strong parent; and the resolution of conflict through loving sacrifice.

The Demi-Gods

A Play in Three Acts

Persons

PATSY MAC CANN	45 years of age
MARY (his daughter)	19 years of age
EILEEN NI COOLEY	35 years of age
A MAN	30 years of age
FINAUN	50 years of age
CAELTIA	45 years of age
ART	19 years of age
A GENTLEMAN	28 years of age
A LADY	22 years of age
A BUTLER	——

ACT ONE

Scene One

A roadside: leaning against hedge at back left is a cart piled with sacks, old pots and pans, bundles in paper and sacking. The shafts are sticking up in the air, and the various bundles are tumbled half in and half out of the cart: In centre there is a lit brazier with a battered kettle on it. As scene opens Mac Cann is fumbling amongst the bundles. He straightens himself stiffly and stares off stage (right).

MAC CANN [*Testily and rather loudly*]: Will you leave that donkey alone, Mary. [*Grumbling to himself*] I never heard the like of it, so I didn't. [*Enter Mary.*]

MARY: What's that?

MAC CANN: I tell you the way you do be going on with the ass is enough to make a Christian man swear, so it is.

MARY [*Rather sullenly: but more weary than sullen*]: You let me be. If I was doing hurt or harm to you I wouldn't mind, and if I *am* fond of the ass itself what does it matter to anybody?

MAC CANN [*Reasonably*]: It's the way, that I don't like to see a woman kissing an ass in the snout. It's not natural.

MARY [*Reasonable also, but tired*]: A lot you know about what's natural. [*Angrily*] Let you leave me alone now. [*Reasonable again*] And, besides that, doesn't the ass like it?

MAC CANN [*Testily*]: That's not a reason. Sure it doesn't matter in the world what an ass likes or dislikes. And, anyhow, an ass doesn't like anything except carrots and turnips.

MARY [*Resolutely*]: This one does.

MAC CANN [*Reasonably*]: And a body might be kissing an ass until the black day of doom and he wouldn't mind.

MARY [*With conviction*]: This one minds. [*She turns to the cart.*]

MAC CANN [*Scornfully*]: Kissing an old ass!

MARY [*Resignedly*]: One has to be kissing something.

MAN CANN [*Resignedly*]: Let you kiss me then and get done with it.

MARY [*In amazement*]: What would I kiss you for? Sure, aren't you my father, and aren't you as old as the hills?

MAC CANN [*Stretches himself on the sacks under the cart*]: Well, well, you're full of fun, and that's what I say. Did you take the winkers off that donkey's face the way he'll get a bit to eat? There's grass enough, God knows, and it's good grass. Are you listening to me, Mary, or are you listening to the donkey?

MARY [*Lies in other sacks*]: It's you I'm listening to.

MAC CANN [*Argumentatively*]: I say this, that if every person had enough to eat, there would be no more trouble in the world, and we could fight our fill – What have you got left for the morning?

MARY [*Enumerating drowsily*]: I've the loaf that I bought in the shop at Knockbeg, and the half loaf that you took out of the woman's window – it's fresher too!

MAC CANN: I was guided. We'll eat that one first thing in the morning, the way no person can claim it – What else have you got?

MARY: I've the white turnip I found in a field.

MAC CANN [*Rising from his bed*]: There's great nourishment in turnips: the cattle do get fat on them in winter. [*He puts some turf on the brazier.*]

MARY: And I've two handfuls of potatoes that you gathered at the bend of the road.

MAC CANN: Roast themselves in the embers, for that's the only way to cook a potato. What way are we going to eat them?

MARY [*Enumerating*]: We'll eat the turnip first, and then we'll eat the bread and after that we'll eat the potatoes.

MAC CANN [*Appreciatively, hungrily*]: And fine they'll taste – I'll cut a bit out of that turnip now.

MARY [*Sitting up*]: You'll leave that turnip alone until the morning.

MAC CANN: Ah, Well! I'll try to hold myself in. [*He pulls out his pipe from his breeches pocket – it has only half a shank – and he puts it in his mouth. He stands with his feet well apart, staring at the ground in an attitude of deep thought.*] Do you know what I'd do, Mary, if I had a bottle of porter beside me in this field?

MARY: I do well, you'd drink it.

MAC CANN [*Looking fixedly at the earth*]: I would so – But before I'd drink it, I'd put the end of this pipe into it, for it's newly cracked, and it sticks to my lips in a way that would anger a man wanting a smoke; but if I could stick it into the porter it would be cured – [*Meditatively*] I don't suppose now that you have a cup of porter in the cart.

MARY: I have not.

MAC CANN: Because if you had a small cup I'd be able to get a smoke this night as well as a drink.

MARY [*Sourly*]: You're full of fun.

MAC CANN [*Still musingly and still regarding the ground*]: I saw a bottle in your hand a while back and it looked like a weighty bottle.

MARY [*Grimly*]: It's full to the neck with spring water.

MAC CANN: Hmm. [*Pause*] You might hand me the bottle of spring water, alanna, until I wet my lips with it. It's a great thing for the thirst, I'm told, and it's healthy besides that.

MARY [*Angrily*]: I'm keeping that cup of water to make the tea, when we'd be wanting it.

MAC CANN [*Soothingly*]: Well, I'll only take a drop out of it, and I won't lose the cork.

MARY: You can get it yourself then, for I've plenty to do and you haven't. [*Her father rubbing his tough chin with his hands strolls carelessly to the cart. He lifts out the bottle, smells it, tastes it, and thumps the cork back vigorously.*]

MAC CANN [*Dolefully*]: It's spring water, indeed.

MARY: I thought you wanted a drink.

MAC CANN: So I do, but I can't stand the little creatures that do be wriggling about in spring water. I wouldn't like to be swallowing

them – Ah! them sort of things don't be in bottles that you buy in a shop – [*Staring upwards*] Eh!!

MARY [*Testily*]: What is it?

MAC CANN: It must have been a bird. I saw it for a second against a white piece of a cloud, and I give my word that it was as big as a haystack. [*Looking up; excitedly*] There it is again. There's three of them.

MARY: Not a thing do I see, and I am looking where you pointed too. Don't be making fun of me now, and we in the dark.

MAC CANN: Birds they were, and each of the three of them was as big as a haystack. I tell you I saw –

MARY [*Snapping as she lies down again*]: Will you go to sleep! Are we to get any comfort this night?

MAC CANN [*Excitedly*]: I tell you them birds were as big as –

MARY: Let them be that big, or bigger than that, I don't care about them. Lie you down now and take your rest.

MAC CANN [*Furiously, but obediently standing on his sack*]: Can't you be listening to me when I'm trying to talk –

MARY: Can't you be going to sleep when you ought to, or let me be going to sleep when I get the chance?

MARY CANN: A man that has a wife has a trouble for his life,
And a man that has a daughter for a wife –
[*Pause*] Are you asleep Mary?

MARY: Yes.

MAC CANN [*Drowsily*]: You're full of fun this night. [*Pause*] I'd have been asleep long ago only for your talking and arguing. [*Pause*] But I'll get a sleep now in spite of you. [*Rolls over*]

[*Enter the three Demi-Gods (right). Finaun is elderly: white-haired: but very robust. He is dressed in a flowing purple robe, and wears a high three tiered crown, closed at the top. On each of his breasts there is a broad golden disc, into which his wings fit from behind. He has golden sandals. Caeltia (pronounced Kayl'cha) is dressed in a robe of cloth of gold; with silver discs on his breasts; two tiered crown and silver sandals. He seems about 40 years of age, & in build, age & appearance much resembles Mac Cann. Art wears a crimson robe dashed with gold, crimson sandals with feathers at the heel, copper discs on breasts and a single tiered crown. He seems about twenty years of age and is very beautiful.*]

FINAUN [*Mildly*]: That is a fire.

CAELTIA [*Pointing*]: And these are people.

FINAUN: We will talk to them. Art, you speak. Ask them where we are? What country we are in? and where we can be lodged for the night?

ART: I suppose it does not matter which I awaken. I'll try this one. [*He bends over Mary.*] This one is a girl.

CAELTIA: Be very gentle with her, she might be frightened.

ART [*Touches Mary on the shoulder*]: Girl!

[*Mary awakens and leans on one arm looking into Art's face for a long moment. Then she throws the sacks off her, still staring, and turns suddenly with a scream, rises, and flies off at left wing. At the scream Mac Cann springs out of sleep hitting his head against the bottom of the cart. The sacks are swathed around him, and he rolls in them towards centre. Then staring in amazement at the visitors he struggles to his feet. They advance towards him very courteously. (Note: the angels are not pompous or ceremonious. They are to be acted in the most ordinary, and even, careless way.)*]

FINAUN [*To Mac Cann*]: I am sorry to disturb you in this manner, but we wish your assistance.

MAC CANN [*Turns his head swiftly to left, roars in a savagely dolorous voice*]: Mary!

CAELTIA [*Smiling*]: The girl ran away.

MAC CANN [*At once vicious and terrified*]: It's what she'd do, the strap!

FINAUN: She was frightened. And yet there is nothing in us to frighten anyone. We are simply lost in the darkness and in the winding of these hills, and we only desire shelter and some assistance for a time.

MAC CANN [*Reassured by their peaceful appearance, but in a somewhat truculent tone*]: You mean you want to sleep under the cart. My own place for sleeping!

CAELTIA: We will sleep anywhere, and in the morning we can talk.

MAC CANN [*Truculently*]: I don't understand a word you're saying. Maybe ye are out of a circus. I'm going back under the cart, and there's a sack for each of you to sleep on. [*Turning violently to left and shouting.*] – Mary! [*To Finaun*] There's a sack for you. You can lie on it or not lie on it just as you please. [*To Caeltia*] And there's a bed for you my fine fellow. [*Shouting*] – Mary! [*To Art*] There's your sack young fellow, me lad. Take it or leave it.

[*They all lie down. After a moment Mary comes creeping back. She moves very cautiously. First she re-arranges her sack, and is about to lie*

down, but instead she creeps to each of the visitors in turn and looks at their faces. At Finaun and Caeltia she looks only for a moment, but into Art's face she peers for a long time. As she returns to her own place her father comes cautiously from beneath the cart and goes to her. He draws her down front.]

MAC CANN [*Angrily*]: Well! So you ran away.

MARY: I was looking was the ass all right.

MAC CANN [*Urgently*]: Listen to me. The best thing we can do is to load the things into the cart without making any noise. Then we'll yoke the little ass as easy as anything; and then I'll get into the cart, and I'll drive off as hard as ever I can pelt, and you can run beside the ass with a stick in your hand and you welting the devil out of him to make him go quick. I'm no good myself at the running, and that's why I'll get into the cart; but you can run like a hare, and that's why you'll wallop the beast. [*Shaking Mary and looking back at the sleepers.*] Mind now, we don't know who these fellows are at all, and what would the priest say if he heard we were stravaiging the country with three big buck angels, and they full of tricks maybe; so go you now and be lifting the things into the cart, and I'll give you good help myself. [*During this speech Mary has been making uneasy movements and gestures of disagreement.*]

MARY [*In a low, angry voice*]: I'll do nothing of the kind!

MAC CANN [*Fiercely*]: Won't you indeed!

MARY [*Glancing towards Art – all her glances have been towards him*]: What would they be thinking of us if they were to rouse and see us sneaking off in that way. I won't do it, and if you make a move I'll give a shout that will awaken the men.

MAC CANN [*Grinding his teeth*]: The devil's in you, you strap! What call have we to be mixing ourselves up with holy angels, that will be killing us in an hour or half an hour; and maybe they full of fun and devilment.

MARY: It's angels they are, or they are rich and very rich men, for they are all over with golden rings and chains of gold, and the stuff in their clothes, I'm telling you, is fit for the children of a king.

MAC CANN [*Thoughtfully*]: Do you think now they are rich folk?

MARY: I do indeed.

MAC CANN [*Heartily*]: Then we won't say anything more about it. [*He moves towards his bed, but she beckons him back.*]

MARY: When they waken up there won't be anything for them to eat and they strangers.

MAC CANN: Hum!

MARY: There are only potatoes in the basket, and a piece of bread and a turnip, and there isn't anything more than that. You will have to find something to eat before the morning, the way we won't be put to shame before the men.

MAC CANN: Do you want me to pick red herrings out of the grass and sides of bacon off the little bushes?

MARY: Get whatever you can get. There's three shillings that I was saving for a particular thing, but I'll give them to you for I wouldn't like to be shamed before the strange men.

MAC CANN [*Taking the money – growling*]: If I knew you had it yesterday I wouldn't have gone to sleep with a throat on me like a midsummer ditch, and it full of dust and pismires.

MARY [*Pushing him towards left*]: Be back as quick as you are able and buy every kind of thing you can get for the three shillings.

Scene Two

The same setting. Morning. The three angels and Mary up and about. The angels comb their hair and beards with their fingers. Mary also is engaged combing her hair.

FINAUN [*Gazing off left, where the donkey is tethered out of sight*]: That animal is – eating! One eats that kind of vegetable.

CAELTIA [*Plucks a piece of grass and puts it in his mouth*]: The time has come for us to eat.

ART: I am certainly very hungry.

CAELTIA [*Removing grass from his mouth*]: It is soft enough to eat, but I do not care greatly for its taste.

[*Mary laughs at them.*]

FINAUN [*To Mary*]: Daughter, we are hungry.

MARY: My father is away looking for food. He'll be back soon and he'll be bringing every kind of thing that's nourishing.

CAELTIA: Let us sit down and wait for him, and you can tell us all about food. [*They sit down in a half circle about her.*]

MARY [*At her hair and rather abashed at the idea of giving a lecture*]: Dogs eat grass when they are sick, so it ought to be wholesome, but folks can't eat it. [*With enthusiasm.*] Potatoes and cabbage are very good to eat, and so is bacon. My father likes bacon when it's very salt, but I don't like it that way myself. Bread is a good thing to eat, and so is cheese.

FINAUN [*Indicating the ground*]: This, I suppose, is grass.

MARY: It is. And there was a jew once who was a king and they say that he used to go out with the cattle and eat the grass like themselves, and nobody says that he didn't get fat. All the same – [*Looking to right.*] Here's my father coming. He has a basket under his arm, and I think there will be food in the basket. [*She gets up and moves to right – Enter Mac Cann with a basket in one hand and a large bundle in the other. She takes the basket from him. He halts before the angels.*]

MAC CANN [*Solemnly*]: The world is full of trouble, and that's a fact.

MARY: If it is let it stay where it is.

MAC CANN [*Not heeding her*]: And I'm telling you this, that if the world wasn't full of trouble there would be no life for the poor. Mary [*He half turns to her with careless pride.*] see if there isn't some small thing or other in the basket, [*To the angels.*] and let your honours sit still on the grass [*He sits down with them.*] while the young girl gets your breakfast.

CAELTIA [*A little anxious*]: What is there in the basket?

MARY [*She lifts out the various things and piles them on a piece of sacking enumerating each as she does so*]: There are two loaves of bread in it. There's a fine square of butter. There's a piece of cheese as big as man's hand, and four times as thick. There is a handy leg of mutton in the basket, with only a small piece taken off the side of it. There is a brown paper bag full of tea, and another one and it full of soft sugar. There's a bottle full of milk, and another bottle of whiskey in it, but it's only half full. There are two tobacco pipes having silver bands on their middles, and a big bar of plug tobacco, without a cut in it.

MAC CANN: Let you be cutting up them things against the breakfast.

MARY: What have you got in the bundle?

MAC CANN: I've got clothes for the men here to wear, the way people won't be thinking they belong to a circus.

FINAUN: If our present clothing is inconvenient we must change it.

MAC CANN: That's what I'm saying. [*He opens the bundle and displays an assortment of clothes.*] There's some duds for you my decent man. [*He piles them in Finaun's arms.*]

FINAUN: But I don't know how to put these things on.

MAC CANN [*To Caeltia*]: And there's what will make you look like a Christian. [*To Finaun.*] Put em on anyhow at all. [*To Art.*] And there's your fit, my young boy-O. [*Art laughs loudly. Pointing off to*

right and gently bustling his companions.] Go down among the trees yonder and make yourselves decent.

FINAUN: You are exceedingly courteous.

MAC CANN: I am so. Hurry up with yourselves now, for the breakfast will be ready before you are half back.
[*Exit angels.*]

MARY [*Suspiciously*]: Tell me this now, where did you get all the food and all the good clothes? You never bought that lot with three shillings in your hand.

MAC CANN: I'll tell you that. I went down the road until I came to a house. The door was open. I gave the door a thump with my fist, but nobody answered. 'God be with all here,' said I, and in I marched. There was a woman lying on the floor, and her head had been cracked with a stick. In the next room there was a man lying on the floor, and his head had been cracked with a stick. It was in that room I saw the food packed nice and tight in the basket that you see before you. I came away a while after that, for, as they say, a wise man never found a dead man, and I'm wise enough, no matter what I look like.

MARY [*Horrified*]: Were the people all dead?

MAC CANN: They were not – They only got a couple of clouts. I'm thinking they are all right by this, and they looking for the basket; but, please God, they won't find it.

MARY: I'd like to know what happened.

MAC CANN: What I'd like to know is this. Who hit the people with a stick, and then walked away without the food and the drink and the tobacco, for that's a queer thing.

MARY: It is indeed.

MAC CANN: Mary, a chree, let you burn up that basket in the brazier for I don't like the look of it at all, and it empty.

MARY: I'll do that, and I'll do it at once. You can give me back my three shillings.

MAC CANN: Eh! Talk sense will you. What would I give it back for, and it in my pocket.

MARY [*Angrily*]: I tell you that I want my own three shillings that I saved.

MAC CANN: One of these days I'll give you back your three shillings, aye, and more than that.

MARY: I don't want it one of these days – I want it now.

MAC CANN: You want a clout on the head, you strap. Hush now, here are these three buckoes coming back. [*Enter the angels talking*

quietly together. Mac Cann strides to them and greets them in a hearty voice.] That's the three of you. Now you look like something. Give me over them things of yours the way they won't be lost.

FINAUN: We did not know what to do with them.

MAC CANN [*Takes their crowns, robes, &c. and stuffs them into a sack*]: You would be losing them in a minute. Are them crowns made of real gold now?

CAELTIA: Mine is made of silver only.

MAC CANN: Bedam. There are the makings of a few half crowns in that. Sit down there for your breakfast, my decent men. Now, Mary, are you going to let us die of hunger, or will you give us something to eat in the name of God? [*Bustle of sitting down & preparation for breakfast.*]

Curtain

ACT TWO

Scene One

A few weeks later. The scene is again a patch of grass, boulder strewn. The company is seated about Mary who is teaching them how to mend pots and pans. Mac Cann is striding up and down, smoking his pipe, and, occasionally, he addresses a remark to the others. Caeltia also is smoking. Finaun is sunk in a reverie. The only who is really paying attention to Mary is Art.

MARY: Now you know what to do when a woman gives you a pot with a hole in it. All you want is a piece of solder in your pocket, and the end of a tallow candle, and a box of matches –

MAC CANN [*Interjecting*]: There's a great deal in the twist of the wrist.

MARY [*To Art*]: So there is indeed, and if you practise what I was telling you it will come easy and pleasant. But if you sit tight the way Finaun does, looking at your knees and not listening to a word that's said to him, you'll never make a good tinker.

MAC CANN [*Nodding towards Finaun*]: Leave him alone. There isn't the making of a tinker in that lad. But the minute he goes to a door the woman of the house gets up and gives him everything she has got in the place. He doesn't want to know anything about pots, except what's inside of them. I hope Caeltia will bring something home.

MARY [*Indicating Finaun*]: He should listen when a body talks.

MAC CANN [*To Art*]: The thing to do my boyo is to keep your feet in your boots and get to work with your fingers, and then you'll grow like me and have real hands on you that aren't feet.

ART [*Glancing upwards*]: There will be rain soon.

MAC CANN: And heavy rain at that. Come on now, for I never did like getting wetted, and nobody does except the people of the County Cork, and they are so used to it that they never know whether it's raining or whether it isn't. [*Enter Caeltia from left carrying a small parcel. He is nodded to by Mac Cann.*] That's yourself. What have you got?

ART: Some people are coming across the field.

MAC CANN [*Looking to right*]: I know the look of that man's legs. I'll remember all about him in a minute.

CAELTIA [*Handing his bundle to Mary*]: Can you tell who the woman is that way?

MAC CANN: I can not, and nobody could, for they're all alike in the skirts.

MARY [*Looking*]: I know that woman by the way she is wearing her shawl.

MAC CANN: You do now!

MARY: I do. That woman is Eileen Ni Cooley and no one else.

MAC CANN [*Hastily*]: About with the lot of you, and away with us this way. [*Pointing to left.*] Mary, a grah, go you and whisper a word in the ass's ear, and maybe he'll go quick, for he is full of fun this day. [*Mary runs off left with Art and Finaun after her. Mac Cann and Caeltia begin to gather up the things which are on the ground.*]

CAELTIA [*Jerking a thumb over his shoulder*]: You don't seem to like that woman?

MAC CANN [*Busy with pots and pans*]: She's a bad woman.

CAELTIA: What sort of a bad woman is she?

MAC CANN [*Harshly*]: She's the sort that commits herself with every kind of man.

CAELTIA [*Dropping a pot*]: Did she ever do that sort of thing with yourself?

MAC CANN [*Very busy*]: She did not, and that's why I don't like her.

CAELTIA [*Recovering the pot*]: I think that the reason you don't like that woman is because you like her too much.

MAC CANN [*Stubbornly*]: It's so; but there's no reason for her taking

on with every kind of man, and not taking on with me at all. [*He dumps the whole arm load of pots, etc., on the ground and talks with furious gestures.*] I tell you I made love to that woman from the dawn to the dark, and then she walked off with a man that came down a little road.

CAELTIA [*Mildly*]: That was her right.

MAC CANN: Maybe it was. But for the weight of a straw I would have killed the pair of them that night in the dark place.

CAELTIA: Why didn't you?

MAC CANN [Harshly]: She had me weakened, and my knees gave under me. [*Angrily grabbing at the pots, etc.*] I don't want to see her at all, for she torments me.

CAELTIA [*Stooping for more of their baggage*]: I think that the reason you don't want to see her is because you want to see her too much.

MAC CANN [*Angrily*]: It's so. And it's so that you are a prying kind of a man and that your mouth is never at rest. [*Throwing down everything that he holds.*] So we'll go on now to the woman yonder, and let you talk with your tongue and your nimble questions. [*Re-enter Mary.*]

MARY: Whatever are you doing, at all?

MAC CANN: We are going to have a chat with Eileen.

MARY: You are a big fool, that's what you are.

MAC CANN: Divil a bit of it. Aren't we old friends anyway? [*He rushes to right and begins to shout.*] What way are you Eileen Ni Cooley? What sort of man is it that's walking beside yourself? [*He walks back, with a kind of contained agitation and anger, and stares fixedly at Caeltia, and then returns again to right.*] Come on now my darling and don't be shy. [*He backs a little as the strangers enter.*] Sure you never were that whatever you were.

[*Enter Eileen Ni Cooley and a man. Eileen is big and thin and red-haired. She is full of the same vitality and stubbornness as Mac Cann and her bearing has, like his, a kind of contained wildness. All of these people have that kind of wildness and restraint, as if they were on the point of doing something and were always not doing it. The man with Eileen is wilder looking than any of them. He is tall and skinny and rugged as a goat. His feet are flat and turn outwards and there is a sagging in his knees. He looks in ill health. But if he is a little grotesque he has some native dignity. Both he and Eileen carry stout ashplants in*

their hands. Mac Cann takes no notice of Eileen. He talks to the man or rather he roars at him, and walks round him threateningly, and gradually edges him to centre of stage. Eileen after one very penetrating look at Mac Cann takes no further notice of him; but at Caeltia she casts continual quick and appraising glances. She sits and talks with Mary.]

MAC CANN [*Roaring with horrible heartiness to the man*]: And how is yourself? It's a while since I saw you, and it was the pitch of night that night.

THE MAN [*Quietly*]: I'm all right.

MAC CANN [*Edging round him and bustling him to centre of stage*]: So you are; and why wouldn't you be. Weren't you born in the wide lap of good luck, and you didn't stay there. Ah! The men that come down little, narrow paths do have fortune, and the ones that tramp the broad roads do have nothing but their broken feet. [*Shouting.*] Good luck to you, my soul, and long may you wave – Eh! [*He pretends he thought the man was going to speak.*]

THE MAN [*In centre of stage. He leans on his cudgel and keeps a very quiet, very watchful eye on Mac Cann*]: I didn't say a word.

MAC CANN [*Provoking, quiet, concentrated*]: And there's a stick in your hands that would crack the skull of a mountain, let alone a man.

THE MAN [*Briefly*]: It's a good stick.

MAC CANN: Would you be calling it the brother or the husband of the one that the woman has in her happy hands? [*Eileen turns at this and fixes a hard stare on Mac Cann.*]

THE MAN [*Briefly, sternly, staring gloomily*]: I would be calling it a stick only.

MAC CANN [*Horribly hearty and very loud*]: That's the name for it surely, for a stick hasn't got a soul any more than a woman has, and isn't that a great mercy and a great comfort, for heaven would be full of women and wood, and there would be no room for the men and the drink. [*Eileen strides to him and placing her hand on his breast she gives him a great push.*]

EILEEN: If you are talking, or if you're fighting, turn to myself, for the man there doesn't know you.

MAC CANN [*Turns to her with a great laugh*]: It's the joy of my life to have your hands on me. Give me another puck now, and a hard one, that way I'll feel you well. [*Eileen lifts her cudgel and crouches towards him, but his look is so savage, as he crouches towards her, that she lets her hand fall again, and she turns sullenly away.*]

MAC CANN [*Laughing furiously*]: You're full of fun, and you always were, but we are going to be great friends from now on – yourself and myself, and [*Jerking his thumb backwards.*] the man with the stick. We'll be going by short cuts everywhere in the world and having a gay time

EILEEN [*Quietly*]: We're not going with you, Padraig, and whatever road you are taking this day the man and myself will be going another road.

MAC CANN [*Scoffing, but hearty*]: Whoo! There are roads everywhere, so you are all right. [*Sneering.*] And there are men on every one of those roads.

MARY: Let you all stop roaring now, for I won't have us disgraced before the men.

EILEEN: What men are you talking about?

MARY: The men here, comrades of ours that are coming up the road.

MAC CANN [*To Eileen*]: You won't get much change out of these men, my girl. They wouldn't look at you any more than they'd look at a she dog.

[*Enter Art, Finaun and Mary – Eileen starts when she sees Art and stares at him. Mary walks over to her and they begin to talk together and both keep glancing at Art.*]

CAELTIA: The rain will be here in a minute. [*Sound of thunder.*] We had better walk on and look for shelter.

MAC CANN [*Has been brooding heavily on Eileen*]: We'll go ahead, for we've had our talk and we're all satisfied. There's a broken-up house along the road a few perches, and it will give us shelter while the rain spills. [*They have all begun to gather up the things on the ground. Mac Cann has his arms full – he turns towards Eileen.*] You can come with us if you like, or you can go to the devil. Bring the cart along with you, Mary.

[*He tramps off to right followed by Finaun and Caeltia, and Mary goes off on other side to get the ass and cart.*]

EILEEN [*Loudly as the others move off, and with a sly glance at Art*]: Whoo! I'm not the one to be frightened, and I never was. So let us all go along and talk about our sins in the wet weather.

[*The others have gone out by this and Eileen walks towards Art eagerly. The other man comes a little nearer, watching her with a look of sarcasm and curiosity. She speaks to Art waving her hand in the direction Mac Cann has taken.*]

EILEEN: Young boy, where did you pick up with the man yonder? for the pair of you don't look matched?

ART [*Hands in pocket, regards her tranquilly. He nods towards the strange man*]: Where did you pick up with this man, or where did he pick up with you? for you don't look matched either.

EILEEN [*Speaking quietly, confidentially*]: We're not. We're not matched a bit. The man and myself do be quarrelling all day and all night, and threatening to walk away from each other every minute of the time. *The man strides to her and stares at her gravely.*

THE MAN [*Gloomily*]: Is that how it is with us?

EILEEN [*To the man*]: It is. [*To Art, coaxingly.*] That's the way it is with us, honey. The man and myself have no love for each other now, and we never had.

THE MAN [*He changes his cudgel from the right to the left hand and stretches out his right hand to Eileen. He speaks sternly*]: Put your hand there, and shake it well, and then be going along your road.

EILEEN [*Violently*]: What are you talking about?

THE MAN: I wouldn't hold the grace of God if I saw it slipping from me. So put your hand there and go along your road. [*She does so a little constrainedly.*]

EILEEN: There it is for you.

[*The man gives her hand one great shake that rocks her. Drops the hand, and strides away to left beating his cudgel on the ground.*]

EILEEN [*To Art*]: Here's the rain. It will be heavy in a minute. Come on with me, young boy.

[*She wraps her shawl about her head and turns away to right. Art looks at her back for an instant, and then goes off in the opposite direction, where Mary went off.*]

Curtain

Scene Two

The interior of a ruinous one-roomed house. At back centre is a low window with no glass in it. There is nothing inside except dust and stones. There are holes in the roof. To the right is a door which is jammed and can't open. To left the empty space where a fireplace had once been. There are holes in the roof and some holes in the walls. As curtain rises Mac Cann puts his head in through the window and looks round the place. He drops some sacks and pots into the room

and climbs through the window. There is an occasional roll of thunder and hiss of rain.

MAC CANN: Come on in the lot of you!

[*The others drop in their sacks and parcels and follow him. Eileen comes in last. Patsy and Caeltia light their pipes. They seat themselves in various positions, Mary beside Finaun; these two clasp hands. Eileen near Art with Caeltia on her other hand. There is some small distance between them all. Mac Cann sits down, and stands up, and moves about the place. Finaun seems to be asleep holding Mary's hand.*]

MAC CANN [*To Eileen, with heavy joviality*]: Eh! Where has the man got to? The man with the big stick? If he's shy let him come in, and if he's angry let him come in too.

EILEEN [*Drops the shawl from her head*]: The man has gone away Padraig. He got tired of the company, and he has gone travelling towards his friends.

MAC CANN [*Delighted*]: You are telling me a fine story, Eileen. Tell me this, too. Did the man go away of his own will, or did you send him away?

EILEEN: It was a bit of both, Padraig.

MAC CANN [*Happily*]: The time to get good news is when it's raining, and that is good news, and it's raining now.

EILEEN [*Non-committal*]: News need not be good or bad, but only news, and we'll leave it at that.

CAELTIA [*To Eileen*]: Do you have a good life going about the country by yourself, and making acquaintances where you please?

EILEEN: I have the life I like, and whether it's good or bad doesn't matter.

CAELTIA: Tell me why you never let himself make love to you when he wants to make it?

EILEEN [*Looking at Mac Cann and looking away*]: He is a domineering man, and I am a proud woman. We would never give in to each other. When one of us would want to do a thing the other wouldn't do it. If I said black he would say white, and if he said yes I would say no, and that's how we are.

CAELTIA: He has a great love for you.

EILEEN: He has a great hate for me. He loves me the way a dog loves bones, and in a little while he would kill me in a lonely place with his two hands, to see what I'd look like and I dying. [*She turns*

her face to Mac Cann.] That's the kind of man you are to me, Padraig, although you're different to other people.

MAC CANN: I'm not that sort of man, but it's yourself is like that. I tell you if I took a woman with me I'd be staunch to her, the way I was [*Pointing to Mary.*] with the mother of that girl there.

EILEEN [*Sternly, rising*]: I know everything I'm talking about, and I won't go with you [*She walks to Art and sits beside him placing her hand on his arm.*] but I'll go with the young man that's beside me.

[*Mary leans suddenly forward and half rises furious as an angry tigress – Art turns to Eileen and looks critically at her.*]

ART: I won't go with you. I don't care for you a bit.

EILEEN [*Removes her hand from his arm and gives a hard smile*]: That's all the worse for me, and it's no harm to you, young boy.

MAC CANN [*Grinning savagely*]: That's a new answer for yourself.

EILEEN [*Calmly*]: It is. And it's a new day for me, and a poor day, for it's the first day of my old age.

MAC CANN [*Crying out*]: You'll die in a ditch. You'll die in a ditch like an old mare with a broken leg.

EILEEN [*Snarling*]: I will when the time comes; but you'll never have the killing of me, Padraig.

[*Mary snatches her hand from Finaun, and leaps to her feet.*]

MARY: Mind what way you're talking, Eileen.

EILEEN [*Wraps the shawl about her head again*]: Don't be angry with me, Mary. I never did you any harm yet, and I'll never be able to do it now, for there are years between us, and they're going to break my back.

MAC CANN: It's still raining. Slip down to the cart, Mary, and bring back whatever food is in it, and there is a big bottle in a bucket in the front of the cart beside the right shaft, and there is a little cup of whiskey in the big bottle.

MARY [*Looking from the window*]: I'll do that. What a night it is! – Whatever will I do with the ass this night?

MAC CANN: Hit him a kick.

[*Exit Mary through the window. Art follows her.*]

FINAUN [*Suddenly and gently*]: I am going to tell you a story.

EILEEN: I could listen to a story for a day and a night.

[*Mac Cann leans back against a corner and pulls solemnly at his pipe. Finaun is looking at him. He nods amiably at Finaun.*]

FINAUN: Before the foundations of this world were laid two people came into being. They lived through myriad existences and they hated each other through the ebbing and flooding of these lives. Now one of them would be a woman and the other a man, and again the one that had been a woman would be a man, so that they might hate in the intimacy which can only come through difference. They did equal harm to each other, for they were born, as all enemies are, equal in being and in power.

MAC CANN [*Nodding at Finaun*]: You're full of fun this day. [*He leans backwards and goes to sleep.*]

FINAUN [*Continues*]: They had many names and they lived in many lands. But in eternity their names are Finaun and Caeltia; but their names here are Padraig and Eileen. Again and again they lived, and desired and were wed. Memory faints at the long tale of their pilgrimage, and of the tales of that embrace which was much repugnance and very little love. To one of them came knowledge, and with its coming they were no longer equal in power or in hate; for the other became a slave, and as slave and tyrant their battle was continued until knowledge stirred in that mind also, and it grew conscious. And now they battled not in the name of hate, but under the holy superscription of love. Again and again, life after life, they harried each other. Their desire for one another was a madness, and in that desire was all their battle. Here there was no respite even for an instant. They blasted each other's lives. They dashed each other's honour in the mud. They slew each other. And by reason of desire they could not leave each other. Life seemed to them as one room wherein dull voices droned dully; wherein something was for ever uttered, and nothing was said; where hands were for ever lifted, and nothing was done. They had reached an end. They were self-conscious. They were vice-conscious, and together they plumbed desire and found wickedness glooming at the bottom. There was a demon whom they had created, the accumulation of their evil, and just as they lusted after each other so he lusted after them. One day that misery shaped itself as a man, and came privily to the woman and taunted her, and after they had talked together the woman cried out bitterly and she went with the spectre into the very gulf and chasm of evil. There she became the concubine of the Demon, and there in his very despite she conjured virtue to her tortured soul. She sat among the rocks, and old misery beside her laughed his laugh, but while she sat knowledge put forth a bud

and a blossom, and she looked through knowledge. She saw herself and the demon and the man, and she saw terribly all that had occurred. She wove a garland of small flowers, and she put it into the hand of the demon, praying him to bear it to the man. So the demon came to the man and he put the chaplet into his hands, saying, My concubine, your beloved, sends a greeting to you with her love and this chaplet of blue flowers which she has woven for you in hell. And suddenly that man felt his heart move within him like water. Love was born at last. Bring her to me, said he to the demon. I will not do so, replied the mocker. Then the man leaped suddenly on his ghoul. He locked his arms around that cold neck. He clung furiously to him with his knees. Then I will go to her with you, said he. And together they went down headlong to the pit, and, as they fell, they battled frightfully in the dark pitch.

[*Enter Mary and Art with food, bottle, etc., before end of last speech and their entry awakens Mac Cann.*]

MAC CANN [*Yawns and stretches himself*]: I didn't hear a word of that story – What have you got to eat, Mary?

MARY: Not much – A bit of bread, a knuckle of cheese, some cold potatoes.

[*They sit closer in a circle, Mac Cann and Eileen facing each other.*]

MAC CANN [*To Mary*]: Share them round, and sit you down.

MARY [*A little awkwardly*]: I'm not hungry somehow. [*She gives her potatoes to Art.*]

MAC CANN: I wish you had given them to me.

EILEEN: I'll give you one of mine. [*She thrusts a potato across which he accepts and eats in amazement at one bite.*]

MAC CANN [*Staring at Eileen*]: Why did you give me your potato?

EILEEN [*Very awkwardly*]: I don't know.

MAC CANN [*Filling and lighting his pipe*]: You don't seem to know anything this day. You're full of fun. [*He hands his pipe to Eileen.*] Here, take a draw at that pipe, and let us be decent with each other.

EILEEN [*Takes two draws at the pipe and hands it back*]: I never was much at the smoking.

[*Caeltia lights his pipe and leans back against a wall. Art is exploring the room and poking about. Mary and Finaun are sitting together hand in hand. Finaun is sunk in thought as in a trance.*]

MAC CANN [*To Caeltia and pointing at Finaun*]: What does he be thinking about when he gets into them fits?

CAELTIA: He does be talking to his hierarchy.

MAC CANN [*His pipe in full blast*]: And who are themselves?

CAELTIA: They are the people in charge of this world.

MAC CANN: Is it the kings and the queens and the Holy Pope?

CAELTIA: No. A different kind of people.

MAC CANN [*Yawning*]: And what does he be talking to them about?

CAELTIA [*Yawning also*]: Every kind of thing. They are asking him for advice now.

MAC CANN: What is he saying?

CAELTIA: He is talking about love.

MAC CANN: He is always talking about that.

CAELTIA: And he is talking about knowledge.

MAC CANN: It's another word of his.

CAELTIA: And he is saying that love and knowledge are the same thing.

MAC CANN [*Rising to his feet*]: I wouldn't put it past him. [*He is in a hideously bad temper. He starts striding up and down the room kicking the stones about and glowering at Eileen. He halts once before Eileen, staring at her, and then resumes his marching. Suddenly he faces to her from some distance away and shouts.*] Well, Eileen a grah, the man went away from you. The man with the big stick and the lengthy feet. Ah! That's a man you'd be crying out for and you all by yourself in the night.

EILEEN: There was no harm in that man, Padraig. [*She rises and wraps the shawl about her head.*]

MAC CANN: Maybe he used to be putting his two arms round you now and then, beside a hedge, and giving you long kisses on the mouth?

EILEEN: He used to be doing that.

MAC CANN: Aye indeed – and he wasn't the first to do it, Eileen.

EILEEN: Maybe you're right, Padraig.

MAC CANN: Nor the twenty-first.

EILEEN: You've got me here in the house, Padraig, and the people around us are your own friends.

[*Caeltia had also risen to his feet and was staring morosely at Eileen. He leaps at her suddenly, wrenches the shawl from her head with a wide gesture and grips her throat between his hands. She falls, he at once lets her go and stumbles away staring wildly at Patsy, who stares back at*

him grinning like a madman. Caeltia stumbles across to Finaun and catches the latter's two hands in his own.]

FINAUN [*Smiling gravely*]: You must not hurt me, my dear.

[*Mary has leaped and caught Art by the hand – and these two back to one end of the room.*]

EILEEN [*Stands up. She wraps the shawl again about her head and gazes fearlessly at Mac Cann*]: The house is full of your friends, Padraig, and there is nobody here with me at all. There is no man could want better than that for himself.

MAC CANN [*In a hoarse voice*]: You're looking for fight?

EILEEN [*Steadily*]: I'm looking for whatever is coming.

MAC CANN [*Roaring*]: I'm coming then. [*He strides to her. Lifts his hands above his head and smashes them down on her shoulders so that she staggers. He stares into her face.*] Here I am.

EILEEN [*Closes her eyes*]: I knew it wasn't love you wanted, Padraig. It was murder you wanted, and now you have your wish. [*She begins to sway under his weight.*]

MAC CANN [*In a low agitated voice*]: Eileen. I'm going to tumble. I can't hold myself up Eileen – my knees are giving way under me, and I've only got my arms around your neck. [*He is limp and sagging.*]

EILEEN [*Opens her eyes and looks down at him as he half stands, half kneels*]: Sure, Padraig. [*She flings her arms about his body and lifts him, but his weight is too great, and he goes down again to his knees. She pulls his head to her breast and crouches by him on the floor.*] Sure, listen to me, Padraig, there wasn't a man of them all was more to me than a blast of wind. You were the one I always liked . . . Listen to me now, Padraig. Don't I be wanting you day and night, and saying my prayers to you in the darkness, and crying out to you in the dawn. My heart is sore for you, so it is. There is a twist in it. O my dear . . . Don't you be minding the men. Whatever they did, it was nothing more than beasts playing together in the field, and not caring anything. We are beside one another for a minute now. . . . When I would put my hand on my breast in the middle of a laugh it was you I was touching, and I do never stop thinking of you in any place under the sky.

[*Mac Cann grips her head in his two hands and stares up in her face; then he falls back half in faint. Mary, Finaun and Caeltia rush to him. Mary catches Eileen by the arm and whirls her violently towards the window. They group themselves for a moment around Mac Cann; and in that moment Eileen slips stealthily through the window and goes away.*

During this latter scene it has been growing steadily darker and Eileen is scarcely seen getting out of the window. It is quite dark near the window at the back of the stage.]

MAC CANN [*Comes slowly and unsteadily to his feet. The others stand back from him. He too looks slowly round the room in search of Eileen, and does not see her. He whirls round again desperately. He cries*]: She got out through the window [*Roaring.*] the devil damn the soul of her.

Curtain

ACT THREE

Scene One

Time six months later. Scene a narrow road. Enter Mac Cann from left.

MAC CANN [*Turning backward and waving his hand to those behind him. He is jovial and hearty*]: Now men! Don't be all day coming along. We've got to find our supper yet. [*To himself as he proceeds towards right.*] Faith, those fellows make me work trying to feed them; and they with appetites like elephants. [*To Mary who has just entered from other side.*] The more you give them to eat the hungrier they get. Where did you leave the ass? [*Tapping her under the chin and speaking with rather pleasant malice.*] You're thinking too much of that young boy

MARY: Indeed I am not. What I'm wondering is where you got all the money from that I saw with you this while back.

MAC CANN [*Jovially*]: Don't be talking any more about that. You know what I said to you the last time.

[*Enter Finaun, Caeltia and Art in close conversation.*]

MAC CANN: So off with you now and mind your business, or some strange person will be marching off with the little ass, and you with your back turned.

MARY [*Briskly*]: I'll have that talk out with you yet. [*Exit to right.*]

FINAUN [*Coming towards Mac Cann*]: We have finished what we came to do, my friend.

MAC CANN: What was it you came to do?

FINAUN: We came to give help to the powers.

MAC CANN: I didn't see you doing much.

FINAUN [*Smiling*]: And we came to see you, and Eileen Ni Cooley.

MAC CANN [*Making the gesture of one who shakes cobwebs and horrid recollections away*]: What did you want to see her for?

FINAUN [*Mildly*]: I am her. I am her self; her Guardian Angel.

MAC CANN [*Staring*]: Are you telling me that? You look a bit like her too. You have your work cut for you, mister honey. [*Musingly.*] I wonder now who is my own Guardian Angel.

CAELTIA [*Takes the pipe from his mouth and puts it hurriedly in his pocket*]: I am.

MAC CANN [*Smacks his knee and laughs heartily*]: Oh, bedad! [*Pointing at Caeltia.*] You are! and I making you drunk every night in the little pubs!

CAELTIA: You never made me drunk.

MAC CANN [*Thinking*]: I did not, for you've got a hard head surely. But there's a pair of us in it, mister. And what about the boy here? [*Pointing to Art.*]

FINAUN [*Turning to Art, gravely*]: His high destiny will be revealed when the time comes. [*Art bows one knee for a moment before Finaun, and then laughs in a friendly careless fashion. Finaun continues speaking to Mac Cann.*] The time has come for us to go away.

MAC CANN [*Leaps and stammers and controls himself*]: You, you – You're not going off this minute are you?

FINAUN [*Mildly*]: Tomorrow will do. [*He turns away left followed by Art.*]

CAELTIA [*Placing a hand on Mac Cann's shoulder and speaking very gravely, almost terribly threatening*]: Tomorrow will do. [*He walks left and exits.* [*Mac Cann in a state of great agitation walks up and down a few times. His attitude is as one cornered and terrified. Enter Mary from side the others have gone out.*]

MARY: They are all in the great hurry this day. And the way they whisper together! There's Caeltia didn't even see me a minute ago.

MAC CANN [*Looking at her as if he didn't see her. Turns away, and then turns swiftly back, making a great effort at recovery*]: I want to talk to you.

MARY: I want to talk to yourself.

MAC CANN: What do you want?

MARY: I want to know where you got all the money I saw in your hand this day?

MAC CANN [*Coming closer and speaking confidentially*]: That's what I'm going to tell you about. Be listening to me now and don't make any noise.

MARY: I'm listening to you.

MAC CANN [*Urgently – pointing in the direction the others have gone*]: I'm tired of these lads before us. What have they got to do with us?

MARY [*Surprised*]: There's a thing to say!

MAC CANN [*Authoritatively*]: This is what we'll do. Tonight we won't unyoke the ass, and when they are all asleep we'll walk off quietly and leave them there. In the morning we'll be distant.

MARY [*Angrily*]: I won't do that.

MAC CANN [*Sternly*]: You'll do what I say, you strap! or it'll be the worse for you.

MARY [*Hissing*] I won't do that.

MAC CANN [*Coldly savage*] By the living – !

MARY [*Furiously*]: What did you do on the men? What did you do on them that you want to run away in the night?

MAC CANN: Keep your tongue in your teeth you – !

MARY [*Pressing him, raging at him*]: Where were you for a day and a half? Where did you get the money that I saw in your hand this day?

MAC CANN [*Beats down his rage and glances cautiously about*]: There's no fooling you, alannah. I'll tell you the truth. I went to the place where we hid their things, the wings and the crowns and all the gold and things. I dug them up –

MARY: Oh!

MAC CANN [*Feverishly*]: I dug them up, and I took them away, and I sold them to a man for money.

MARY: Oh!

MAC CANN: They're sold, do you hear? There's no going back on it. So do what I tell you about the ass this night.

MARY [*Whispering*]: I won't do it.

MAC CANN [*Grinning with rage*]: You won't do it! What will you do against your father?

MARY: I'll go on with the men.

MAC CANN: You'll come with me this night!

MARY: I'll not go.

MAC CANN [*Terribly*]: I'll not go – [*Enter Caeltia.*]

CAELTIA [*Quietly*]: Is there anything wrong?

MAC CANN [*Composing himself in a flash*]: Nothing: not a thing. The girl's only laughing at a joke I made.

CAELTIA [*Sternly*]: Tomorrow we will be going away from you. Let us be peaceful for our last night together.

MAC CANN [*With poor joviality*]: Ah indeed. Let us be comfortable for this night of all nights. [*Exit Caeltia.*] You'll have to be looking after that ass for fear – [*Caeltia is gone – and he returns quickly to Mary.*] What are you going to do? Give me two hours' law this night until I can get away, and then you can tell them and be damned to you.

MARY [*In a low voice*]: Who did you sell them to?

MAC CANN: To the man in the big house behind Ard-Martin.

MARY: We are close enough to it. Listen to me.

MAC CANN: I'm listening.

MARY: There is only one thing to be done. Go you to the place of that rich man and take the things away from his house. [*Mac Cann straightens up and stares at her.*] Bury them back again the place they were buried, and if you want any help I'll go with you myself.

MAC CANN [*Beaming all over his face*]: You're full of fun this day. [*Thoughtfully.*] I wonder I didn't think of that myself, for it's the thing that ought to be done. [*He thumps a heavy hand on Mary's shoulder and is once more his capable and contented self.*]

MARY [*Suspiciously*]: You'll do that?

MAC CANN [*Jovially*]: I will so. Come along now, my girl, and we'll catch up on the men.

MARY [*In a shy voice*]: Father!

MAC CANN [*Impatiently*]: What more do you want? [*She moves to him and puts her arms around his neck.*] What the devil do you want? [*He tries to wriggle loose, then, with a grunt, he puts his arms around her.*] Come on – [*Laughing.*] That ass will be gone on you by this.

[*They move towards exit.*]

Curtain

Scene Two

The same night. The scene is a well furnished room. A library. Oak panelled. Bookcases on wall. A wide, high window in centre with heavy tapestries drawn closely over the window. The room is lighted by a large shaded lamp hanging from the ceiling. There is a table at back centre of room, a little to one side of the window. At the other side down front there is a heavy leather divan. On this divan a sack is lying, and, half in, half out of the sack is a tumble of wings and

robes – the angels' property, a crown and a pair of wings are lying on the carpet. Chairs, bookcases. There is a door at each side of the room.

The scene opens on the room. It is empty. Wait of about ten seconds. Then the tapestry on window moves gently and Mac Cann peers through. He looks cautiously about the room, and advances cautiously. He has a heavy cudgel in his hand. Then he catches sight of the sack of wings, etc. He throws one hand above his head in triumph, when the sound of a bell and a footstep send him scampering noiselessly back behind the heavy curtains at the window.

Enter a man about 25 years of age, with a clean-shaven, lean face. He is tall and slender. Dressed in evening dress. Behind him is a servant, who has opened the door for him, and stands inside. He carries a small tray in his hand with coffee cups, liquor glasses, cigarettes, and this he puts on the table near centre.

THE MAN [*To servant*]: Did you tell your mistress I wanted her?
THE SERVANT: Yes Sir. She said she would be here in a moment.
THE MAN: Very good

[*Exit servant. The man stands with his back to the window looking steadily at the closed door. His hands open and shut once or twice. Mac Cann looks through the curtain and nods his head grimly and meaningly at the man. He hides again quickly. The door opens and a woman comes in. She also is tall and slender, dressed in evening dress, décolletée. Gold hair, very light. Her dress, her hair are filmy. A lawn is about her shoulders, and floats as she moves. The man stands very ceremoniously.*]

THE MAN: Won't you sit down?

[*She sits and busies herself with the coffee cups. He sits at the other end of the table. He rises and takes a cup from her and returns to his seat.*]

THE MAN [*Stirring his coffee and looking into his cup. He speaks in a rather low voice – The whole of this scene is played very quietly*]: I got a letter from your mother this morning.

THE WOMAN [*Coldly*]: I did not know you corresponded with her.

THE MAN [*With a slight gesture of the hand*]: Nor did I know that your correspondence was so – peculiar as I have found it.

THE WOMAN [*Questioningly*]: You are reopening this question.

THE MAN: I am. I must. Your Mother confirms everything which I have – complained of.

THE WOMAN: My mother dislikes me; she would confirm anything bad that was said of me.

THE MAN: She is your Mother.

THE WOMAN: Oh no! She is not. When I ceased to be a child she ceased to be a mother. We are only two women who are so well

acquainted that we can be enemies without any shame of each other.

THE MAN: Are you not talking nonsense?

THE WOMAN: I committed a crime against her. She cannot forgive me for being younger than she is, and for being pretty in her own fashion. She left my father because he said I was nice looking.

THE MAN [*With a movement of his shoulder*]: All that – !

THE WOMAN: As to what she would do against me, you should know it, considering the things she told you of me before we were married.

THE MAN: You admitted they were not all untrue.

THE WOMAN: Some of the facts were true. All of the colouring was false. But it is an old story now, or I had fancied so.

THE MAN: One forgets the old story – until the new story drags it to memory.

THE WOMAN [*Moves her shoulders slightly*]: I begin to find these conversations tiresome.

THE MAN: I can understand that – With her letter your mother enclosed some other letters from her friends. They insist on the facts. They add others.

THE WOMAN: Are they letters, or copies of letters?

THE MAN: They are copies.

THE WOMAN: And my Mother has forbidden you to disclose the fact to her friends that she forwarded their correspondence to you.

THE MAN: Naturally.

THE WOMAN: Naturally. The reason being that there are no originals of those letters. She wrote them herself.

THE MAN: Again, are you not talking nonsense? [*A pause.*] There are some things I cannot do. [*A pause, and constrainedly.*] I cannot search in unclean places for unclean information. [*Again a silence, which she makes no effort to break – he speaks.*] You do not say anything? [*A pause.*] We must settle this between us. [*Her hand is on the table. He reaches across and lays his hand on it. She stiffens and he draws his hand away. Gently.*] We are reasonable creatures and must question our difficulties. We must even help to resolve them.

THE WOMAN [*Briefly*]: They are not of my making.

THE MAN [*Sharply*]: They are – and you are lying to me shamelessly. [*Silence. The woman sits upright, looking with a forced calm into space. The man has placed his hand to his forehead, his elbow is on the table. He speaks as with an effort.*] There are things I cannot do. There are elementary duties we owe to each other, and which cannot be

renounced by either of us. We each must expect a personal, a domestic loyalty.

THE WOMAN: I expect nothing.

THE MAN: I expect that. I expect it as I expect air for my lungs and stability under my feet. You must not withdraw that from me. You are a member of my household. You live in it.

THE WOMAN: I have accepted as little as was possible.

THE MAN [*Leaning forward*]: I love you. I am not demonstrative, and I am shy of this fashion of speech. Perhaps that shyness is responsible for much in a world eager for speech and gesture; but I say it now, in all gravity. Be at least as honest as I am. I cannot live on the half knowledge which is jealousy. It tears my heart. It makes me unfit for thought, for life, for sleep, even for death. I must know or I am a madman, and a man no longer. [*The woman passes her hand over her face. He continues.*] Have you anything to say to me? [*She does not reply.*] Are the statements in your Mother's letters true?

THE WOMAN [*In a low scornful voice*]: My Mother's letters!

THE MAN [*In a low voice*]: Have I reason for this jealousy?

THE WOMAN [*In a low voice*]: I will not tell anything. [*They both rise, the woman languidly; the man a second after her.*]

THE MAN [*In his ordinary voice*]: I will leave here in the morning.

THE WOMAN [*In her ordinary voice*]: You will let me see the boy?

THE MAN [*Without any accent*]: If I ever learn that you have spoken to the boy I will kill you, and I will kill the boy.

[*He opens the door for her and she passes through. He shuts the door, and stands with his face to it for a few seconds. Then he opens it again, and goes quietly out. Mac Cann comes from behind the curtains. He shakes his cramped knees, and listens for a few seconds. Then he goes quickly to the sack on the divan. Takes the things, crown, etc., from the floor and stuffs them into the sack. Puts the sack over his shoulder and goes to window. He gets out through the window, and disappears. The curtains swing back behind him.*]

Curtain

Scene Three

The next day. Scene a disused quarry. Tumbled boulders and heather. The brazier is smouldering near left and Mary is attending to it, cooking. Finaun, Caeltia and Art are sitting together at centre talking. Mac Cann is absent.

FINAUN: That is arranged, we can leave any moment now.

ART [*Soberly*]: I shall be glad to go. I am tired of this world. There seems to be no sense in it.

MARY [*A little distance away, holding up a pair of rabbits and a hen*]: You didn't do so badly this time, Caeltia.

[*Enter Eileen Ni Cooley running from behind a spur of rock at left. Her hair is hanging about her. Her shawl is streaming from one shoulder and is torn. Her dress is tattered. Her face anxious. She runs past the angels to Mary, catches her arm, and looks back right. Enter The Man who was with her on her first appearance. His big cudgel is in his hand; but while he was self-contained in the first scene he is boisterous and sneering in this one. He halts as he reaches the angels, puts his stick under his arm, sticks his hands in his pockets and looks at them, laughing innocently. While he is entering Eileen and Mary speak. Eileen arranges her dress.*]

MARY [*Astonished*]: What's wrong with you?

EILEEN: Where's your father?

[*The Man swaggers around the angels who take no notice of him.*]

MARY: He went away for a while to do something. He ought to be back any minute unless [*With misgiving*] something has happened to him.

EILEEN [*In a low voice*]: What am I going to do at all? That man has me tormented the way I don't know how to manage.

MARY: What could my father do and you playing tricks on him the day you were born?

EILEEN [*Agitated*]: He won't leave me alone.

MARY [*Coldly*]: If my father owes you anything I'm ready to pay it for him. So let us both rise against the man and may be the pair of us would make him fly.

EILEEN [*In a voice of much contentment*]: We'll do that, Mary, and let us do it now. [*She drops her shawl and they advance threateningly on the man, who laughs loudly at them.*]

FINAUN [*In a commanding voice*]: Stop. [*They stop on the instant. He continues.*] Come and sit down here. [*As they are sitting down Mac Cann enters from right. He catches sight of the man first, and halts an instant. He does not see Eileen at the moment.*]

MAC CANN [*Harshly*]: It's the man himself! The man with the lengthy feet and the big stick!

THE MAN [*Savagely*]: Sit down and hold your prate, or I'll take your life.

MAC CANN [*About to leap on him, sees Eileen and stares at her*]: It's yourself.

EILEEN: It's me sure enough, Padraig.

MAC CANN: You'll be going away in a minute I suppose. [*He sits down slowly beside the strange man – who looks at him and giggles loudly – He continues coldly to Eileen.*] You're a great woman, and you're full of fun surely.

EILEEN [*Quietly*]: I don't want him, but I can't get away from him. He won't let me go on my own road; and he is marching at my elbow for two days and two nights; cursing and kicking, and making a noise every step of the way.

MAC CANN: He's doing that?

EILEEN: He's doing that. Catching me he does be, and beating me.

MAC CANN [*Looks for a second at the man who sniggers*]. Aye!

EILEEN: I can't get away from him, and I thought if I could find yourself–

MAC CANN [*Turning his eye again to the man*]: You'll be let alone from this day out.

THE MAN [*Growling*]: Mind yourself, my hardy man. Mind yourself, or you will waken up among the spooks.

MAC CANN: Spooks! [*Suddenly he rolls right over on top of the man, catches him by the throat with one hand and smashes viciously at his face with the other. They both roll for a moment on the ground, then scramble to their feet.*]

FINAUN [*As they prepare to rush together*]: Stop. [*To the man.*] Go your way, and God be with you, my friend. [*The man hesitates, turns and stumbles away without a word. Exit at left. The others have all risen and there is commotion and dispersal.*]

MAC CANN [*In high good humour to Eileen*]: Well he's gone anyhow.

FINAUN: We are in haste, and we had better be going on. [*He moves off to right followed by Mary and Art. Eileen sits herself apart against a rock and occupies herself again putting her dress in order and arranging her hair. Caeltia and Mac Cann remain at other side of stage left centre.*]

MAC CANN [*To Caeltia*]: You'll be feeling fine when you get into your grand clothes again. [*Thoughtfully.*] That is if you get them. [*He lights his pipe.*]

CAELTIA: Why should you doubt that we shall get them?

MAC CANN [*Argumentatively*]: Suppose they were robbed on you, mister! Wouldn't you be rightly surprised if that happened?

CAELTIA [*Quietly*]: They were robbed.

MAC CANN [*Dropping his pipe*]: Eh!

CAELTIA [*Laughingly*]: Yes indeed.

MAC CANN [*Sourly*]: You're full of fun. What are you talking about, at all?

CAELTIA: Finaun and I were wondering what the person who stole them would do.

MAC CANN [*Angrily*]: What did he do?

CAELTIA: He put them back. [*Silence. Mac Cann is terribly abashed. Caeltia continues.*] There is a thing I would like to see done my friend.

MAC CANN [*Humbly*]: What's that, your honour?

CAELTIA [*Meaningly*]: I would like to see the money thrown into this ditch.

MAC CANN [*Pugnaciously*]: What's that! You're full of–There's no sense in that.

CAELTIA [*Pleasantly*]: I would like to see that.

MAC CANN [*Lamentably*]: Give me a reasonable thing to do in the name of God, and I'll do it.

CAELTIA [*Coldly*]: Am I asking anything of you? [*A silence.*]

MAC CANN [*Swelling, proudly, magnificently*]: What is it after all? [*He thrusts his hands into his pockets and draws them out full of gold and silver.*]

CAELTIA: It is easily done. [*Exit Caeltia.*]

MAC CANN: So it is. [*He swings an arm.*] Wait though. [*He calls to Eileen who has drawn near.*] Don't be a stranger, Eileen. Here's something I want to show you. [*He shows her the gold, etc.*]

EILEEN [*Gasping*]: There is a great deal of money there!

MAC CANN [*Magnificently*]: There's fifteen golden pounds and some shillings in it, and here's all I care for them. [*He swings his hand and throws the money afar.*] That's all I care for the stuff. [*Eileen starts to run to pick up the money, but he grips her arm.*]

EILEEN: What made you throw all the golden money away, Padraig, and the silver money?

MAC CANN [*Majestically*]: Stick your arm through mine, and let us be comfortable as we go along, for the pair of us haven't had a talk for a long time.

EILEEN [*Takes his arm as they move towards exit left*]: Aren't you the queer man, Padraig?

MAC CANN [*As they move*]: I suppose you'll be slipping away from us some time tonight?

EILEEN [*Humbly*]: Not if you want me to stay, Padraig.

MAC CANN [*Jocosely*]: We'll see what Mary says about it. [*Moves

towards right off.] She's hugging that beast again. [*Shouting towards right off.*] Can't you leave that ass alone, Mary? Give him back his snout. [*Enter Mary from right.*] And behave like a Christian girl.

MARY [*Testily*]: You leave me alone. What harm am I doing?

MAC CANN [*Reasonably*]: It's that I don't like to see a woman kissing an ass.

MARY: If you don't look at me you won't see anything.

MAC CANN [*Sternly to Mary*]: You're full of fun, so you are.

EILEEN [*Excitedly*]: Here's your comrades coming back. Fine, gaudy men they look. [*Enter from left Finaun and Caeltia dressed as in first scene of First Act, crowns, etc.*]

MAC CANN [*With other business in his mind*]: Well, you're off now. I'll be seeing you a bit of the way myself.

FINAUN [*Gently*]: No. We part here. We do not wish to be seen at the last.

MAC CANN [*A little sulkily*]: You can have it your own way.

FINAUN [*Walks over to Mac Cann, puts his hands on his shoulders and kisses him tenderly on both cheeks*]: May the gods be with you forever.

MAC CANN [*Amazed and horrified at being kissed*]: You're full of – ! [*He stops. Finaun goes to Mary and Eileen who hold up their faces and he kisses them. He marches quietly to right and exits. Caeltia then advances to Mac Cann. Mac Cann hastily, and in order not to be kissed, draws his pipe from his trouser pocket, puts it into his mouth and lights it.*]

MAC CANN [*Puffing lustily; in an offhand tone*]: Well, you're going off!

CAELTIA [*In a low voice*]: I am going off.

MAC CANN [*Smitten with compunction, holding his pipe out to Caeltia*]: Here man, take a pull at that and ease your heart.

CAELTIA [*Smiling*]: No. It's good-bye now. [*Mac Cann at once puts his pipe into his mouth.*]

MAC CANN [*Carelessly*]: There's my hand for you. [*Holds out hand. Caeltia takes the hand in both of his.*]

CAELTIA: May the gods be with you forever. [*He waves a hand at the two women who are standing by, and turns to right exit. Mac Cann shoves the pipe into his pocket and hastens after him.*]

MAC CANN [*To Caeltia*]: Listen. I played a trick the time I was taking the money out of my pocket to throw it away.

CAELTIA [*Gravely*]: Yes?

MAC CANN [*Hurriedly*]: I let one of the gold pieces slip through my fingers, and it's lying at the bottom of my pocket at this minute,

but I'll throw it away, mister honey, if you say so.

CAELTIA [*Smiling contentedly*]: If I were you I'd keep it.

MAC CANN [*Nodding, and very earnestly*]: I will keep it, and I'll spend it. [*Caeltia raises his hand gravely, turns away and goes after Finaun – Exit.*]

MAC CANN [*Briskly to Eileen and Mary*]: Now then, you women, come along or the evening will be down on us before we get anywhere.

EILEEN: Art will be here in a minute.

MAC CANN: He'll catch up on us before we get to the bend of the road. Give me your fist here. [*Eileen links his arm, and they move away to right.*] Come along, Mary.

[*Mary follows them a few paces and then halts – exit Mac Cann and Eileen. Mary returns towards centre. Her movement is full of dejection. Enter Art from left. Art is carrying his crown, wings, robes in his hands. He is dressed in the country clothes of the previous acts. He comes softly towards Mary and halts by her.*]

ART [*Puts all his clothes, etc., on the ground, holding only the wings in his left hand. He speaks gently*]: Girl! [*Mary rises from the gound.*] I have come to say good-bye.

[*Mary averts her head from him and holds out her hand. He takes her hand, holds it an instant and then brings it to his lips. Her hand falls. She keeps her face averted and does not speak.*]

ART [*Bends beseechingly to her*]: I have come to say farewell. [*He takes her hand again.*]

MARY [*Turns and looks at him. She speaks sternly*]: Say your say, and go your road.

[*He looses her hand. Stamps on the ground. Swings his arms aloft, gripping the wings, and with a fierce movement, he rips them in halves, puts the halves together and rips them again, and throws the pieces away from him.*]

ART [*With a great laugh*]: Now!

MARY [*Staring, incredulous*]: Oh!

ART: You and I will go down after your people.

[*Mary puts her hands to her face. She is weeping. Art places his arm about her shoulder. They move towards exit.*]

CURTAIN

Julia Elizabeth

A Comedy In One Act

Characters

MRS O'REILLY, aged 40
MR O'REILLY, aged 45
MR O'GRADY, aged 22

Scene

A neatly furnished room. Framed oleographs on the walls. Door in centre, another door at right, and window left; between window and door, a cupboard with plates, etc. in it. Towards right, a small table has been laid for supper. Mrs O'Reilly is cutting a loaf. Her husband is finishing his slice of bread and watching her. She puts a newly cut slice on her own plate and he snatches it.

MRS O'REILLY [*With a great sigh*]: Everything's a trouble. Everything. Doesn't it make you think of the hymn, 'I'm but a Stranger here, Heaven is my Home'?

MR O'REILLY: No ma'm it does not. Where's Julia Elizabeth?

MRS O'R. [*Takes up the loaf and knife and begins to cut more bread*]: I thought that slice was for me. You eat much quicker than I do. God help me! I wish you'd give me a chance, O'Reilly.

MR O'R. [*Fiercely*]: I wish you'd give a plain answer to a plain question, and leave me alone about your food. Always eating you are, like all the women. [*Snatches the newly cut slice.*]

MRS O'R: Oh!

MR O'R: Eat in your sleep if you could. Now then, ma'm, in two words, where is Julia Elizabeth? My whole blessed life seems to go by asking that question, and yours is spent dodging the answer to it. Where is she, I say?

MRS O'R: I don't know.

MR O'R: Ha!

MRS O'R: And that's three words.

MR O'R: You don't know! What kind of an answer is that for a woman to give about her own daughter?

MRS O'R. [*Angrily*]: Don't barge me, man. A nice daughter she is, to have to give such an answer about. Leave me alone now, for I'm not well, I say, on the head of her. Ah she's the queer one, I tell you!

MR O'R: And she has the queer mother too! Why couldn't you have a son like any other woman?

MRS O'R: Ah be sensible, man! [*Tearfully.*] I never know where she does be. It's you she takes after, O'Reilly.

MR O'R: Me!

MRS O'R: Yes. She's always after pleasure. One night it's [*She tries to imitate her daughter's voice.*] 'I'm going to a dance, mother, at the Durkins –'

MR O'R: Ha' penny hops! Can't you cut me a piece of bread?

MRS O'R: And another night she [*Imitating again.*] wants to go out to see Gracie O'Neill.

MR O'R: I know her well. All clothes, and no morals! A bankrupt's baggage!

MRS O'R: And the next night she [*Imitating.*] wants to go to the theatre, ma.

MR O'R: Dens of infamy! If I had my way I'd shut 'em all up and put the actors in gaol so I would, with their hamleting and their ha-ha'ing and their gamy-acting out of them.

MRS O'R: [*Wringing her hands*]: I can't keep her in. [*Energetically.*] And I won't try to any longer. She gives me a headache when I talk to her, so she does. Last night, when I just mentioned about her going out with that Rourke man, she turned round as cool as you please and told me to shut up. [*Weeping.*] Her own mother, mind you. 'Shut up,' says she. Just like that. . . . And the eye of her would astonish you!

MR O'R: If she spoke to me like that I'll bet I'd astonish her.

MRS O'R: And doesn't she? You never say a word, but she has a look in her eye that's next door to calling you a fool – I don't know where she is at all to-day.

MR O'R: What time did she go out?

MRS O'R: After breakfast.

MR O'R: And now it's suppertime. That's good! Can't you give me a bit of bread, or is it that you want to eat the whole loaf yourself. The hunger and greediness of women is enough to poison the

world for archangels let alone men. Try to remember that I do pay for my food.

MRS O'R. [*Resignedly*]: 'Where are you going to, Julia Elizabeth?' says I. 'Out,' says she. And not as much as the wind of another word could I get out of her. [*Weeping.*] Her own mother, mind you, O'Reilly, and her best clothes.

MR O'R. [*Rising*]: She is loafing about the streets with some puppy who has nothing of his own but a cigarette and a walking stick and they both borrowed. [*Moving to door at right.*] I'll have a talk to her when she comes in, and we'll see if she tells me to shut up. [*Bangs the door and exits.*]

MRS O'R: Maybe I'll get a bit to eat at last. God knows I want it. [*Begins to cut loaf.*] As if I hadn't enough trouble already, trying to keep a cranky man like her pa in good humour, without being plagued to death by Julia Elizabeth. Skin and bone is all that'll be left of me in no time. Ah, there's many a woman – [*Knock at door. Mrs O'R. loudly.*] If you are a woman trying to sell ferns in a pot I don't want you, and I don't want Dublin Bay herrings or bootlaces either, so you can just take yourself off. [*In lower tones.*] The crankiness of that man is more than tongue can tell. It is so. As Miss Carty says: 'I shouldn't stand it for an hour.' [*Knock.*] Come in can't you! And well she may say it, and she a spinster without a worry under heaven but her suspicious nature and her hair falling out. And then to be treated the way I am by that girl! It'd make a saint angry, so it would. [*Knock.*] Good heavens! Can't you come in, or are you deaf or lame or what? [*Goes to door and discovers young man. Heartily.*] Come in, Mr O'Grady. How are you now, at all? It must be nearly a week since you were here last. Your mother's well, I hope. Sit down there now and rest yourself. Some people are always well, but I'm not. Sit there beside the window, like a good boy, and make yourself comfortable. It's hard to have poor health and a crotchety husband; but we all have our trials. Is your father well too? But what's the use of asking! Everyone's well but me. Did your Aunt Jane get the pot of jam I sent her last Tuesday? Raspberry is supposed to be good for the throat; but her throat's all right. Maybe she threw it out. I'm not blaming her if she did. God knows she can buy jam if she wants to without being beholden to anyone for presents, and her husband in the Post Office. Well, well, well, [*Beaming.*] I'm real glad to see you. And, now, tell me all the news.

MR O'GRADY [*Very young, very embarrassed, very well-behaved*]: I'm

afraid there isn't much to tell, ma'm. Father and Mother are very well, thank you, and Aunt Jane got the jam all right, but she didn't eat it, because –

MRS O'R. [*With proud humility*]: I knew she didn't: I knew she wouldn't. We all have our troubles and jam doesn't matter. Give her my love all the same, but maybe she doesn't want it either.

MR O'G: You see, the children got the jam, the minute it came into the house, and they cleared the pot. Aunt Jane was very angry about it.

MRS O'R. [*Interested*]: Was she now? It's real bad for a stout person to be angry. Apoplexy or something might ensue and death would be instantaneous, and cemeteries the price they are at Glasnevin and all. But the children shouldn't have eaten all the jam at once. It's bad for the system that way. Still, God's good, and maybe they'll recover.

MR O'G. [*Laughing*]: They didn't seem much the worse for it. They said it was fine jam.

MRS O'R. [*Indignantly*]: Well they might, with raspberries eightpence the pound in Grafton Street, and the best preserving-sugar twopence three farthings and coal the way it is. Ah! no matter, God's good and we can't live forever.

MR O'G. [*Timidly*]: Is Julia Elizabeth in, ma'm?

MRS O'R: She's not, then. We all have our trials, Mr O'Grady, and she's mine. I don't complain, but I don't deserve it, for a harder working woman doesn't live; but there you are and there I leave it.

MR O'G. [*Shyly but bravely*]: I'm rather glad she's out, for I wanted to speak to yourself and your husband before I said anything to her.

MRS O'R. [*Faces him slowly and stares open-mouthed*]: Did you now. And is it about Julia Elizabeth you came over? I thought it was more jam. Well, well, well, just to think of it! [*Archly*.] I guessed it long ago when you began to come often. [*Briskly*.] She's a real good girl, Mr O'Grady. There's many and many's the young man, and they in good positions, mind you. . . . But maybe you don't mean what I mean at all. Is it a message from your Aunt Jane or your Mother? Your Aunt Jane does send messages. God help her!

MR O'G: It is not, Mrs O'Reilly. It's, if I may presume to say so, it's about myself.

MRS O'R. [*Rapidly, enthusiastically*]: I knew it when you bought the yellow boots. She's a fine cook, Mr O'Grady, and a head of hair that reaches down to her waist and won prizes at school for

composition. . . . I'll call himself. He'll be delighted. He's in the next room making faces at a map. Maps are a terrible occupation, Mr O'Grady. They'd ruin any home, and as for spoiling your eyesight, and making you curse – Ah well! [*She ambles to the inner door, calling.*] O'Reilly, O'Reilly. Here's young Mr O'Grady wants to see you. [*Enter Mr O'R. in shirt sleeves and with a pen in his mouth.*]

MR O'R. [*Severely*]: What brought you round young man? Can't you go and play marbles or something somewhere?

MR O'G. [*Stammering nervously*]: It's a delicate subject, sir. I – I thought it was only right to come to you first.

MRS O'R. [*Rapturously*]: Isn't it splendid, O'Reilly. You and me sitting here growing old and contented in the evening of our days, and this young gentleman talking to us the way he is. Doesn't it make you think of the song, 'John Anderson, my Jo, John.'

MR O'R. [*Harshly*]: It does not, ma'm. [*To O'Grady.*] What do you want?

MR O'G: I want to speak about your daughter, sir.

MR O'R: She's not a delicate subject.

MRS O'R: No indeed. Never a day's illness in her life, except the measles, and they're wholesome when you're young. And an appetite worth cooking for, two eggs, every morning, and more if she got them.

MR O'R. [*Turning on her with angry upraised hands*]: Oh! [*To Mr O'Grady.*] What have you to say about my daughter?

MR O'G. [*Stammering*]: The fact is, sir, that is, sir, I'm in love with her, sir.

MR O'R. [*Sarcastically*]: I see. You are the delicate subject. And what then?

MR O'G: And I want to marry her, sir.

MR O'R: That's not delicacy, that's disease, young man. Have you spoken to Julia Elizabeth about this?

MR O'G: No, sir. I wished first to obtain your and Mrs O'Reilly's permission to approach her.

MRS O'R. [*Warmly*]: And quite right, too. [*Turning to O'R.*] Isn't it delightful! Isn't it lovely to see a young bashful youth telling shyly of his love for our dear child. Doesn't it make you think of Moore's beautiful song, 'Love's young Dream' O'Reilly?

MR O'R. [*Snapping*]: It does not. I never heard of the song, I tell you, and I don't want to. [*To O'Grady.*] If you are in earnest about this –

MR O'G: I am indeed, sir.

MRS O'R: He is, of course. Anyone could see that, O'Reilly.

MR O'R. [*Continuing*]: If you are in earnest about this you have my permission to court Julia Elizabeth as much as she'll let you. But don't blame me if she marries you.

MRS O'R: Oh!

MR O'R. [*Sternly*]: People who take risks must look out for accidents. Don't go about lamenting that *I* led you on, or hooked you in, or anything like that.

MRS O'R: He wouldn't do the like. No one would.

MR O'R: I tell you, here and now, that she has a rotten temper.

MRS O'R. [*Aghast*]: For shame, O'Reilly.

MR O'R: A rotten temper. She gives back answers.

MRS O'R. [*Wildly*]: Never! O never!

MR O'R: She makes faces and scratches like a cat.

MRS O'R. [*Tearfully*]: A falsehood! A base innuendo!

MR O'R: She is obstinate, sulky, stubborn, and cantankerous.

MRS O'R: A tissue! An absolute tissue!

MR O'R: She is a gad-about, a pavement-hopper, and when she gets the toothache she curses like a cabman. Now, young man, marry her if you like.

MR O'G. [*In a ringing voice*]: I will, sir, and I'll be proud to be her husband.

MRS O'R. [*In a frenzy of enthusiasm*]: Good boy! Tell your Aunt Jane I'll send her another pot of jam. Tell your mother I'll – [*to O'Reilly.*] – Isn't it delightful, O'Reilly. Isn't it splendid! Doesn't it make you think of the song, 'True, True till Death'?

MR O'R. [*Grimly*]: It does not, ma'm. I'm going back to my work.

MRS O'R. [*Pleading*]: Be a gentleman, O'Reilly. Won't you offer Mr O'Grady a bottle of stout, or a drop of spirits?

MR O'G. [*Hastily*]: O no, ma'm, not at all. I never touch intoxicating liquors.

MRS O'R. [*Beaming*]: Splendid! You're better without it. If you knew the happy homes it has ruined, and the things the clergy say about it. I only take it myself for the rheumatism; but I never did like it, did I, O'Reilly?

MR O'R: Never, ma'm. I only take it myself because my hearing is bad. Now, listen to me, young man. You want to marry Julia Elizabeth, and I'll be glad enough to see her married to an industrious, sensible and sober husband. When I spoke about her a minute ago I was only joking.

MRS O'R: I knew it all the time. Don't you remember, Mr O'Grady? I winked at you.

MR O'R: The girl is a good girl, and well brought up.

MRS O'R: God knows she's that: her hair reaches down to her waist, and she won a prize for composition, 'Jessica's First Prayer,' all about a girl with –

MR O'R: She brings me a cup of tea every morning before I get up.

MRS O'R: She'll bring it to you, too. She never wore spectacles in her life, and she got a prize for freehand drawing.

MR O'R: She did so.

MRS O'R: The Schoolboy Baronet, it was. All about a young gentleman that broke his leg, down a coal mine, and it never got well again until he met the girl of his heart.

MR O'R: Tell me now. How are you young people going to live, and where?

MRS O'R: Your Aunt Jane told me that you had nearly a pound a week. Take my advice and live on the south side. Two rooms, easily, and most salubrious.

MR O'G: It's not very much, of course. But I'm young and strong.

MR O'R: It's more than I had when I was your age. [*Knock at door.*] Hello, there's the post.

MRS O'R. [*Goes to door and return with letter*]: It's addressed to you, O'Reilly. Maybe it's a bill, but [*Plaintively.*] God's good, and maybe it's a cheque.

MR O'R. [*Reads letter in amazement, and begins to stutter angrily. He shakes his fist at his wife*]: Here's your daughter, ma'm. Here's your daughter, I say.

MRS O'R. [*Amazed*]: Where? What is it, O'Reilly? [*She moves hastily towards him.*]

MR O'R. [*Repelling her fiercely*]: A good riddance!

MRS O'R: Tell me, O'Reilly. Tell me all, I command you.

MR O'R. [*Snarling*]: A minx! a jade!

MRS O'R. [*In loud despair*]: I insist. I must be told. I'm not well I tell you. My head is going round. Give me the letter.

MR O'R: Listen woman, and you too, young man, and be thankful for your escape. [*Reads.*] 'Dear Pa, This is to tell you that I got married to-day to Christie Rourke. We are going to open a little fried-fish shop in Amiens Street. Hoping this finds you as it leaves me at present. Your loving daughter, Julia Elizabeth.' 'P. S. Give Christie's love to Ma.'

MRS O'R. [*In a trance of astonishment whispers*]: Married! Christie! [*She*

turns to Mr O'R.] What an amazing thing. Doesn't it make you think of the poem, O'Reilly, 'The World Recedes, it Disappears'?

MR O'R: It does not, ma'm.

MRS O'R. [*Tearfully*]: And what is this poor young gentleman going to do?

MR O'R: He's going to go home. He ought to be in bed long ago.

MRS O'R: A broken heart is a sad companion to go home with. Doesn't it make you think of the song, O'Reilly – ?

MR O'R: It does not, ma'm. I'm going back to my work, [*Bangs door and exits.*]

MR O'G. [*Timid, but polite to the last*]: I think I had better be going now. Good-bye Mrs O'Reilly.

MRS O'R. [*Smiling madly*]: Must you really go? [*Shakes hands.*]

MR O'G: I'm afraid so.

MRS O'R: Well, give my love to your Ma and your Aunt Jane.

MR O'G: I will and – [*With firm politeness.*] – thank you for a very pleasant evening. [*Exit.*]

MRS O'R. [*Stares about her vaguély. Her eyes fall on the table. She marches angrily towards it. In a loud threatening voice*]: I haven't had a bit to eat this day!

CURTAIN

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