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This is to let you know that I got the St. Patrick's Day cards, and also the (Wolfe Tone Annual) quite safely. The cards were very beautiful both from an artistic and poetical point of view and as for the Annual - well - words fail me to describe the pleasure I derived from reading it. I could not, and would not lay it down until I had it read from cover to cover. So from the Red River Valley, famous in song and story, I shall try to give some of my reactions on reading of places and people I knew so well in the long ago.

I was born in delvin Co. Westmeath, in Dec. 1880. My boyhood years until 1895 were spent around Delvin. It was there in that beautiful spot with the Catholic Church at one end of the street and a towering Norman castle at the other end that I played as a barefooted boy almost seventy years ago. The National School was located about a mile outside the town (Ballinvalley it was called) and to it we wended our way every day. When we arrived at school we usually had punishment meted out to us on account of our being so late, but why? - we were all extremely fond of games - football; 'commins' handball, and 'cricket'. The latter we did not know to be a foreign game nor did we care as long as it was a game.

In those days the Gaelic Athletic was sweeping the country and every townland, parish and village had it's football club. They all had patriotic names, 'Delvin Emmetts', 'Clonmellon' - 'forget their name', 'Athboy', 'John Mandevilles', 'Kinnagad', 'Slashers', 'Mullinger', 'John Mitchells', 'Collinstown', 'Killallon', 'Cill Scire Castle pollard crossakeel and many others. In the end football became the popular game with the school boys and, not being financially able to get the real we improvised our own footballs by stuffing an old pocket with hay or grass and tying up the opening - what fun! and what games we had. But games were not everything in those years. We had to study or take the consequences. There may be just ground for criticism of the system in vogue in those far away days but there is one thing we must admit, we were well grounded in the fundamentals, reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, grammar and geography and, of course, parsing, and also, most important of all Catechism. That was the subject that was stressed in those bygone days. I was fascinated by your description of preparation for Confirmation. I seemed to be reliving in my mind and soul and heart every incident that you so vividly described, as my experiences were identical. In those days the outstanding items were, the intensive preparation in school, the instructions by the priests and finally the visit of the Diocesan Examiner, and the receipt of the Confirmation cards. Then the great day of suspense and fear and hope, when we all assembled in Church before the Bishop for questioning. The dread that we would be put back (rejected) and then the joy and delight when we came through.

I happened to be one of those who had to come up before the Bishop before the whole congregation. His first question to me was on Baptism. He took his mitre off and told me it was an infant in danger of death and to baptize it. I did so, he then asked how much water I would use. I replied, 'Three fistfuls!'. I can still hear the tittering in the church.

While I am still on the subject I am convinced after reading your Annual that in those boyhood days we were very close to each other and had a lot in common. I was confirmed by Dr. Nulty and I believe you were also, and you must have got your Confirmation card from Father Concannon, who was Diocesan Inspector for Meath. I served his Mass many times and knew him quite well. His father was Workhouse master at the same time that Thomas Higgins was chairman of the Board of Guardians. In my days as Mass server I got to know many of the priests of the Diocese but the one I remember best was Father Kelly a C.C. from Clonmellon who always gave me 6 pence when I had served his Mass - The kindnesses we remember through the years. In after years when Dr. Nulty, Bishop of Meath, died I remember the funeral panegyric was preached by Rev. Father Kane, a Dominican, who was blind. I read the sermon in the newspaper and I never forgot the opening sentence, "Beside the grave thought and silence meet, death speaks and life listens".

Yes, I remember the wakes and the recitation of the De Profundis on entering the house of the dead. Many times, as a boy I had to recite it. In the diocese of Meath the De Profundus was always recited after Mass, and being a Mass server I knew it "by heart". Nowadays I am afraid that many of the old customs are sneered at, and criticized by those who are too stupid to understand and too proud to appreciate the deeply embedded traditions and customs (all of which have a beautiful significance - religious and mystical) so common among the people of Ireland in my young days.

I have said that at school we got well grounded in the fundamentals, with one exception, a tragic one, viz. we were never taught one word of the History of Ireland. But in spite of that dastardly omission from the school curriculum the spark of patriotism was kept alive to issue forth in later years as an unquenchable flame. How was it done? Well, first of all by the stories told around the fireside on winter nights, stories of Fionn and the Franna, tales of great Irish chieftains handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, vividly told by semi-illiterate but genuinely patriotic story tellers.

Another aid to the small spark was the ballad singers who went from town to town, from village to village, and from Fair to Fair. Their songs were always of a patriotic theme, sometimes local and sometimes national. In my young days they usually stood in the centre of the street opposite a pub, and started off in voice that could be heard from one end of the street to the other, they went from shop to shop, their songs might be about the shooting of the landlord or an eviction or perhaps the false imprisonment of an innocent man but whatever the theme the opening line was "Come all you sons of Granuaile".

Then the Ballad sheets were sold and some phase of our history was brought to the attention of the audience. I guess the Ballad singers are gone from the scene but somehow I think of them as very like the minstrels who went from palace to palace and from castle to castle in the old days and amused Kings and Chieftains with their music and song.

Before I was able to read my father used to read for the whole family the newspaper 'The Weekly Freeman'. Those were the days when the Irish Parliamentary Party was in the zenith of its glory and the 'Freeman' was the leading nationalist paper in the country. He used to read the speeches of the Irish members in the House of Commons. There were

great speakers amongst them, Michael Davitt, John Dillon, William O'Brien, John Redmond, Thomas Sexton, Blake, Tim Healy and many others and, of course, Parnell. How avidly I listened, as far as I could understand, to the recital of Ireland's woes and wrongs and thus the spark was kept alive.

I remember as well as if it were yesterday, as a boy walking along the street in Delvin one man on the opposite side of the street called across to a man quite close to me, "Hey did you hear the news, Parnell is dead", and so tragedy struck and a split came in the ranks of the Irish people which it took years to heal. I believe the Parnellites and Anti-Parnellites fought the bitterest battles of all in Meath and Westmeath. The Priests in most instances encouraged by the Bishop were anti-Parnellite. The two leading newspapers took opposite sides and the Parnellite paper, "Independent" was forbidden in the Diocese of Meath, as a boy I used to get secretly a copy of it from a school chum for my father. 'The Weekly Freeman' was in those days of stress and strain, a great inspiration to the people both politically and nationally. What I loved most about it was the colored supplement which came with every edition. These supplements made a deep impression on me and gave me food for thought in my boyhood years, scenes at evictions showing a battering ram and all the accompanying tragedies which were part of such dastardly deeds, pictures of Nationalist leaders unjustly imprisoned, some of whom died there, amongst these was John Mandeville, who died in Tullamore Jail. I remember well the inscription underneath the picture "John Mandeville, patriot and Mart. done to death in Tullamore jail by order of James Arthur Balfour". By this time I was becoming more proficient in reading and at that time there was a weekly magazine viz, the "Shamrock" in which I became interested. It was published in Dublin.

The serial stories which were published in the 'Shamrock' did more than anything else to give me a desire to know more about the history of my country, it's poetry and it's literature.

There was one author in particular whom I loved, James Murphy, his stories were just what I loved, Irish to the core and they made a deep and lasting impression on me, and kept that spark of patriotism alive in my young receptive mind.

A number of stories appeared (not all by James Murphy) whose authorship I forget but I still remember the titles of many of them; 'Fontenoy O'Farrell - the ashing young schout of the Irish Brigade', 'O'Driscoll of Daragh, the outlaw of the mountains', 'The White Knight of Kilbenny', 'The Forge of Clohogue', 'The Shan Van Vocht', 'The House on the Rath', 'The Fortunes of Maurice O'Donnell'.

There were many poems published in the 'Shamrock' at that time also, all of which had a great influence on me and gave me that love of Irish poetry which I am proud to say I never lost.

"So as I grew from boy to man, I bent me to that bidding, My spirit of each selfish plan and cruel passion ridding, For this I hoped some day to aid, oh could such hope be vain, When my dear country would be made, A Nation once again."

Yes, time marched on, and I finally bade farewell, at the age of 14 1/2 years to my native village. It was a beautiful village but - "Why should memory love to trace, Youth's glad and sunlit way, When those who made it's charm so sweet, Are gathered to decay".

I am not going to bore you with an account of my wanderings, suffice it to say, I got to see many places of picturesque or historic interest in the country, and I also studied more diligently to get a thorough knowledge of many subjects which were necessary and fundamental, for a student if he were to be at least fairly well educated. I do not know if I succeeded, but I tried. Then came the beginning of the present century and with it a change hardly perceptible came over the country. I noticed it in the poems which began to appear in various publications. There was one young man from Clonmellon, named Brian O'Higgins whose poems interested me very much. Yes, they were just what was needed to add fuel to that small spark which would soon burst into flame, and sweep the country like a prairie fire. Irish Ireland was born.

There were two poems of yours which I enjoyed at that time, viz, 'The Dying Sagart', because it was about Father O'Growney whose home was only about four miles from me, on the road to Athboy and the other was, 'The Shamrock and the Cross'. This has been my favorite through the years that have passed since it was written. I consider it a complete resume of Irish History.

I recited it in Ireland at a concert, in Upton, Co. Cork, on March 17th, 1914 - my last recitation in Ireland. I have also recited it in this country on a few occasions.

The Gaelic League was gathering strength at this time, and I began to get interested in the Language movement. In my native Delvin there was no Irish. The only words in Irish which I had ever heard was when my mother would say "go and get me a bucket of water from Cobap Muppe".

The Language Movement led by Douglas Hyde swept the country and I was one of thousands who got engulfed in the enthusiastic onward march. Meetings, concerts, processions, feisanna, excursions to Irish speaking districts, slogans, all combined to strengthen and vitalize the determination to reach that goal for which all reached and longed and worked and prayed namely an Irish Ireland.

I have often thought since those days and still think that if the enthusiasm and patriotism were instilled into the hearts and minds of the people there would be no need for compulsion, it would be a labor of love. The Irish people never did like compulsion and I believe they do not like it now.

I spent the first five years of the century in the city of Galway and to this city tourists flocked from all parts of the country all anxious to learn their mother tongue from native Irish speakers. Those years were really and truly the 'Golden Age' of the 'Irish Revival' movement and to me they were years of hard, intensive study of Irish. There was one man in particular who was a native Irish speaker, he was also well versed in the grammar and literature of the language, to whom I appealed in all my difficulties and he cleared things up so that I began to become capable of reading fairly well.

Galway was an ideal spot in which to learn to speak the Gaelic language and breathe the Gaelic atmosphere.

The Claddagh, the Aran islands, Conemarra with it's mountain glens and further north, Croagh Patrick (which I often climbed) were sources of great pleasure and left a certain impression on me which time has never eradicated.

I can still see the moonrise over Claddagh and watch the sun set on Galway Bay.

Many times have I stood on the road at Salthill and gazed far out over the Atlantic beyond the Aran islands to that spot in the ocean where Hy Brasail was supposed to be but I did not see it, nor was I tempted to go forth in search of it, however, I saw the most beautiful sunsets and the golden clouds curtaining the sun made it look like an Eden, away far away.

I met many prominent leaders of the Gaelic movement during my sojourn in Galway, the most prominent and most beloved being Douglas Hyde. Many others I met there also, at the meetings and feisanna which were regularly held there and it is quite possible that you and I could have been standing side by side at one of those gatherings. I met a couple of priests there also whose names you mentioned in your 'Annual'. One was from San Francisco, I think his name was Father Yorke. A Feis was being held in Galway and he stood up to speak, I remember so well his first sentence, viz. "It is like a sin against the Holy Ghost to speak English at this gathering". Of course he got a wonderful reception.

The other was a Redemptorist who was giving a Retreat to the boys in the school. His name was Father Coyle, he was a native of Fore and a wonderful preacher.

There were many other members of the Gaelic League also whose names I have forgotten through the years. There was one Concerto singer from Dundalk named Ludwig, who toured the country singing Irish songs and he visited Galway. He had with him, on the tour, a young girl named Lily Foley and she sang in true traditional style, "The Old Plaid Shawl". I learned years afterwards that she became the wife of John McCormack, the great tenor, who was also a neighbor of both you and I.

It is about time I should bring this long drawn out and, I fear, very uninteresting epistle to a close.

To be brief, I spent my last years in Ireland in a small village in West Cork, Upton. I continued to study Irish and in July 1911 I attended a session in Ballingeary College, one of my most highly prized possessions is a Certificate I got from that college. I am also proud to say that some months before leaving Ireland I wrote an examination and was successful in obtaining a bi-lingual certificate from the National Board of Education, but I did not stay in Ireland long enough to make use of it.

The President of the College was Father Nolan, Professor of Irish in Maynooth.

During the years that I spent in Upton I took a very active part in sports and Athletics. Hurling was the favorite game and every village and town in West Cork had it's Hurling Club. Kinsale, Clonakilty, Bandon, Ballineen, Dunmanway, Skibbereen, Kilbrittan. I hurled against all those. I got to know most of the players, many of whom as I learned afterwards, took very active parts in the fight for Freedom, some even laying down their young lives. I remember one in particular, Richard Barrett of Ballineen, who made the supreme sacrifice. I remember him so well because he succeeded me in the school when I left there in 1914. To all of us he was Dick. May he rest in peace.

There was another player on the Kinsale team whom I knew very well, having often hurled against him, and I have an idea you may have known him also. His name was brought to court and fined for having his name in Irish on a cart.

Your poem, 'Moses Ritooralalay' always reminded me of that incident and could have been inspired by it.

On the team on which I played there was a brilliant young man named Sean McCarthy who was elected T.D., and is now Lord Mayor of Cork. He has also been prominent in the G.A.A. in which he filled many important positions. There were many great athletes around that district but they were too numerous to mention.

In conclusion I wish to thank you for awakening so many memories, almost, but not entirely, forgotten. I would conclude in Irish, but that is almost but not entirely forgotten also. It is forty-five years since I heard or spoke a word in Gaelic so you can understand why with me, it can be just a memory. In conclusion my thoughts are very well expressed in a poem written by you, "There are singing streams in Royal Meath, Whose voices never cease, From dawn of day 'till the twilight grey, They chant their hymns of peace, But their murmuring lives in the exile's heart, With a weird, sad, haunting wail, Like the cries of woe that must always go, In the track of the wandering Gael."

TE MEAP MDP

signed:- Christopher B. Kiernan