

They see social life as a play well cast, in which none of the parts is unimportant, and which must be entertaining if every actor has a chance to do his best.

We have often wondered whether in any country in the world it is possible to find an atmosphere more buoyantly happy than is created in England by a crowd of leisured young people. Without social art, we had almost said without social instinct, they possess an unrivaled capacity for corporate happiness which in later life is lost. The fact does not prove that we as a people do not deserve the criticisms of our gifted neighbor, but only that in youth mankind is gay or serious by infection. Where young people consort freely together, as they do here and in America, social life is possibly for a very short time more enjoyed than in countries in which it has become more of a fine art.

The Spectator

BY THE PEAT FIRE

BY SUSANNE R. DAY

MARY CONNOR'S shop was well known to all the village. It stood on the sweep of the hill just beyond Drinan's public house, a little thatched cottage with a field or two at the back, where Mary bred fowl and fattened a pig for Dingle market. Her stock in trade, piled on a few rude shelves, hammered against the kitchen wall, was miscellaneous, ranging from bulls' eyes and long sticks to copybooks and needles, lemons and tea, but business was precarious at the best of times, for the handful of cottages comprising the village sheltered people whose incomes were microscopic, and whose wants were few.

Consequently, to be in Coomalague and not to patronize Mary Connor's

shop was to place ourselves outside the pale of social consideration, so we diligently bought uneatable sweets across her tiny counter, wondering the while why the place was always full of bare-legged gossoons who swung their legs and sucked bulls' eyes as they huddled together on the high-backed settle that stood by the fire. Mary would abuse them roundly at the top of her hearty voice, and declare to God she hated the very sight of them, nasty messy things, bringing the muck of the countryside into her clean kitchen. She would order them out with useless energy, but the boys only grinned, whispering to themselves in Irish, as they crunched ecstatically, while shy little girls slipped timidly through the door and snuggled down by the glowing turf.

Perhaps it was because of the children that the old woman who sat on a low stool in the chimney corner was blotted out during our earlier visits. We realized her negatively as one realizes an inanimate object which enters the line of vision without disturbing it, but as the days went by we grew to look for her and watch for the long, slow sigh of old age that dragged wearily up from her heart. Inert, motionless, hands folded on lap, she crouched with the immemorial patience of the peasant, rarely speaking, rarely moving. Hour after hour, day after day she watched the peat fire burn, wrapped in her thick black shawl, her brooding eyes fixed on the glowing embers, her old frame bent and still, heedless of the whispering, nudging children, and the voluble women who brought all the gossip of the countryside to her door.

It was some time, I think, before she became aware of us. Men and women were to her but shadows, dark clouds passing across her shining dreams, obscuring their beauty. The jar and

fret of human intercourse confused her. It was with difficulty she dragged herself back to the unreal, uncared-for world about her, for the misty lands she loved to wander in were far away, lands where age and weariness were forgotten and her feet trod again the rainbow-hued meadows of youth.

There was something infinitely aloof, mysterious, beautiful, in the patient old figure waiting over the fire, lost in remembrance of a bygone world and of a life that had slipped forever behind the dark shutter of time. Into that world we knew we could never hope to enter; but once, for an hour, the shutter was raised.

It was evening. All day long, blinding sheets of rain sweeping up from the Skelligs drenched the village, blotting out the sea. Depressed by the gray, monotonous skies we turned our steps to the cottage as twilight fell, and perhaps because the dusk stole softly down upon us and the little kitchen was lighted only by the glow of the heaped-up turf our talk turned upon the shadow world that lies so near and yet so far away. Then the inert figure that crouched over the fire stirred into unwonted life, the eyes kindled, the bent frame straightened, the quivering voice became full, and on a flood of poetic imagery and vivid story we sailed deep into the land of Bridget Connor's dreams.

With her, treading the gleaming sands on a night of full moon in Samhain, we saw an inky coracle riding the wind-tossed water. Full of men it was, shadowy men, who bent to their oars, drawing their net through the encircling waves and then, leaping out as the boat reached the shore, hauled in a stream of fish that glistened like silver in the light of the moon. There on the sands they piled it, and it growing ever bigger and bigger, and Brid-

get, watching, saw that it was Thady Donoghue's sons that were in it; but when she ran down the strand calling to them to give her their fish the coracle sank down under the water, and men and nets and the silver hill faded away in the moonlight, and when she called aloud in her fear only the lapping of the water and the cry of the curlew answered her.

And then she told us of a man she knew who had gone over the mountains to a deep and distant glen to seek a straying heifer. And the veils of night closed in on his heart, and he felt the raw edges of the wind that sighed upon the hills and he was afraid. And he wandered on, over hillside and bog, and great weariness took him, and he lay down in the shelter of the ditch to rest. And as he lay, watching the stars and they coming out one by one, a stranger came by and spoke to him. Very tall and dark was the stranger, but the man was not afraid, and he followed him where he led. And they came to a great palace, where halls gleamed with lights and jewels that were the wonder of the world, and men and women of unearthly beauty were dancing there to the sound of fairy harps. And the men, drawn onward by the dark stranger, listened and watched and because he was weary when tables laden with exquisite foods, and wine the color of amber, and wine the color of blood, rose out of the ground before him, he would have eaten and quenched his thirst. And the dancers waved their white arms to him, and he sat down at a table—and then an old, old woman with white, white hair, drifted before him whispering '*Ná Blas, Ná Blas*'—'Don't taste, don't taste.' So he turned away and would not drink and the dancers mocked and sung to him, and all night long the blood-red wine tempted

him, but still the old, old woman drifted softly by, crooning her blow 'Ná Blas, Ná Blas.'

And then darkness fell, and he remembered no more, but when light came again to his heart he was lying on the hillside, and the heifer he was seeking grazing peacefully at his side in the rising dawn.

And so from tale to tale the old woman passed, and we heard of the fairy cattle that roamed the darkling roads, and of the *púca* that rose out of the sea to trample the standing corn. Coal black he was with eyes like fire, and he raced the fields like the wind. But strangest of all was the tale of the young girl the fairies stole away and kept in *Tír na n-óg* for a month and a day, and ever after that at set of sun speech went from her, and not till the crowing of the morning cock did the enchantment fall from her lips, and the music of her voice come to her again. But never since the day she went 'away' could she, nor any man nor woman, make butter come in the churn on the farm lands of Carrigphas.

The rising wind fretted the thatch and drove sharp spurts of rain against the narrow window. Night folded her wings upon the village; in the cottage the fire burned low, the old voice with its rich musical speech rose and fell, then trailed away into silence. In the stillness we could hear the crickets chirp; one by one the children slid away through the door; slowly and painfully Bridget raised herself from her wooden stool.

'There's no one left for the stories now,' she said wistfully as she bade us good-night. 'The gossoons and the childher won't be listening to them at all, but I mind the time when I was young, 't was then you'd be hearing the stories. Long miles the men and the women would walk, and there'd be

a big fire on the hearth, and everyone round and everyone with their story. But them times are gone, aye, them times are gone.'

Slowly she stumbled to the foot of the stairs. 'It's only the papers they care for now, and to be whispering talk among theirselves by the shore. But God be with the times that are gone. I'd sooner be hearing the stories.'

Slowly, with the long sigh of old age dragging from her heart, she climbed the steep and narrow stair. 'Aye, God be with the times that are gone, I'd sooner be hearing the stories.'

The Irish Statesman

SWIFT AND GULLIVER

OF all the great satirists, Swift stands the least in need of a commentary. His style is so lucid, his allusions so direct, that the bulk of his work might well have been written to-day, rather than little short of two centuries ago. Thackeray, who was far from doing him justice in other respects, says truly that, 'He lays his opinions before you with a grave simplicity and a perfect neatness.' Thus schoolboys read him for his story, and vote him the equal of *Masterman Ready*, *Treasure Island*, and their modern successors. If a good deal of the irony escapes them, they feel thoroughly at home in a judiciously expurgated Lilliput, and find in the Academy of Lagado a pleasing exposure of the futility of much of their own studies. To maturer minds the quarrels of the High-Heels and the Low-Heels, between the Big-Endians and the Little-Endians, despite their eighteenth century turn, seem as actual as the disputes between Coalition and Labor, or Orthodoxy and Dr. Hensley Henson, Bishop of Hereford.

A cheap edition of Swift, therefore,