Éamon de Valera—

Bruree Man

By

MANNIX JOYCE

THE flood of emigration was flowing strongly from Ireland to America in 1885. Few travelled against that mighty human tide, to exchange a land of hope and opportunity for a land of defeat and despair. And for that reason some people might claim to see the force of destiny at work in the journey of a man and a child from the United States to Ireland in that unpromising year of '85.

The man, a big six-footer named Edmond Coll, was coming on a two-fold mission: to visit his boyhood home at Knockmore, Bruree, and to leave there, in the care of his brother Patrick, the small son of their sister Catherine, whose husband had died a short time before. That small son's name was Éamon de Valera.

Young de Valera was hugging a toy violin as he left the ship, the s.s. *City of Chicago*, at Cobh; he was still hugging it when he alighted from the train at Bruree. The day of the arrival of uncle and nephew at Bruree was April 20th, 1885. They went straight to Patrick Coll's house, a neat labourer's cottage, situated about three-quarters of a mile distant, on the left-hand side of the white, bush-sheltered by-road that leads northward from Bruree to Athlacca. Here they received a royal welcome from friends and neighbours.

Edmond Coll returned to the States in due course, but the baby de Valera remained behind, growing up under the watchful and loving eye of his grandmother, old Mrs. Coll, and of his uncle, Patrick. The house that was now home to him looked out on the low, green hill that gave the townland its name, and had its back to the oft-sung Maigue, that flowed close to a deserted palace of Munster, half a mile away.

After a few years it was time for young de Valera to begin his schooling. A neighbouring youth, Jamsie MacEniry, who lived in a house down a boreen near Coll's house, called for him on the appointed day, which was in May, 1888, and, hand in hand, the pair set out along the straight, white road to Bruree school, where Jamsie introduced the "new scholar" to his first master, Thomas MacGinn. The master was not quite sure how he should spell the new pupil's name, but was enlightened by Tom Mortell, a lad who lived at the other side of the road from Coll's house. In the journey between Tom's lips and the master's ears, the name

must have suffered a sea change, for the master wrote it down as Eddie Develera. And there beside the Maigue bridge, in that grey, limestone, brick-faced building, with the date 1862 carved upon it, the boy de Valera first learned to write his name; there, too, the future mathematician, whom Einstein would one day number among the comparative few who understood his Theory of Relativity, first learned that two and two make four.

The list of pupils in Infants' Class in Bruree Boys' School, for the year ended 30 June, 1889, was as follows:—Pat Horgan, William Cooney, John Daly, Michael O'Brien, Eddie Develera, Tim Hannan, John Savage, Frank Ward, Thomas Coleman, Pat Carroll, John Murphy, Gerald Ruddle, James Coleman, John Morrissey.

During his time in Bruree national school, de Valera was to be taught by a number of other teachers besides Thomas MacGinn. They included John Kelly, of Killacolla, one of the fine old types of teachers; Garrett Hayes, another excellent teacher, whose brother, Doctor Richard Hayes, was the distinguished historian; and, for a brief period, James Kelly, a young teacher and a brilliant mathematician who made a great impression on the student de Valera.

Even in his early years at school, de Valera displayed that love and understanding of theoretical mathematics that was to characterise his entire scholastic career, and to continue with him in after life, even in the trials and strife of revolution and politics. People who remember his schooldays at Bruree recall that he was one of the most neatly dressed pupils who passed down the village street in the mornings.

Sometimes, at night, when old women from the neighbourhood dropped in to his grandmother, for what they would call a *seanchas*, he would hear them conversing in a strange tongue that he discovered afterwards was Irish. He learned many Irish words and phrases from these and other old people of the district, so that it could be said that he made some slight contact with the then almost vanished Limerick Gaeltacht. In 1946, when he was Taoiseach, and when the freedom of Waterford City was being conferred on him, he spoke of the Gaeltacht of the Waterford Decies, and told how some short time previously a scholar had informed him that it was Decies Irish that had been spoken in the Bruree district, which was on the borders of Limerick's *Déise Bheag*. Had he known that, when he was beginning to learn Irish, the Taoiseach declared, he would have chosen the Decies dialect rather than the Connemara dialect.

Again at Ring College, on June 16, 1962, at the first All-Ireland Gaeltacht Convention, he regretted he did not speak the Decies dialect that had been spoken in Bruree in the past: *Mo bhrón nach iad fuaimeanna na nDéise atá agam, cé gurbh iad sin na chéad fhuaimeanna a chuala mé nuair a bhíos i mo bhuachaill óg. In aice le Brú Rí an t-am sin, na sean daoine ar fad, nach mór, ba Ghaeilgeoirí dúchais iad, agus ba í canúint na Rinne a bhí acu.* (Alas, that it is not the sounds of the Decies I have, although these were the first sounds I heard when I was a young lad. Near Bruree, at that time, almost all the old people were native Irish speakers, and it was the Ring dialect they had).

In neighbours' houses in Knockmore and Knockfenora and the Forty Acres, Jim Connolly, a tailor from Bruree, used to recite at night to enchanted audiences, folktales that were as old and as lovely as the hills—*The Steed of Bells, The Little Grey Man of Knowledge, The King of Ireland's Son*, and an English language version of *Séadna*. De Valera would not be allowed out at night, but he managed to hear the stories second-hand, usually on the morning after their recital. And so, here in this quiet Limerick countryside of rich fields and dairy herds, he listened, and

caught the secret voice of the nation. He shared the traditions of the people, their music and their songs. By winter firesides, where crickets chirped, and where the kettle hung cronawning on the crook, he heard with pride of the gallant Sarsfield; of Emmet and Tone; of the Bruree Fenians who fought at Kilmallock in '67, and left one of their number dead on the bullet-swept street. He heard of the Great Famine, and of the Land War and its evictions and clearances. And many a time he heard the famous story about the shoemaker, O'Donnell, and the Planter, Ormsby, from Athlacca. He heard about the hurling matches and race meetings and match-makings; about the feats of great mowers and spadesmen—about all those things that are the warp and woof of Irish life in the countryside. In Bruree church he served Mass for Father Eugene Sheehy, a courageous priest of the Land League, who had spent four months in prison in 1881 for his outspoken views on the misgovernment of Ireland.

On 6 January, 1922, when the Treaty was being debated in Dáil Éireann, someone threw at de Valera the charge that he was not Irish, and that he did not understand the people of Ireland. De Valera, denying the second part of the charge, replied, "I was reared in a labourer's cottage here in Ireland." Two *Irish Independent* correspondents, who were present when he made that declaration, wrote:

> "Never did we feel so proud of the personality of the man who had led us to the threshold of freedom as when he made that passionate outburst and revealed his soul as he had never previously done."

While Éamon de Valera was still a schoolboy at Bruree it was not everybody in the locality who could correctly spell or pronounce that strange Spanish name of his. All knew it was a foreign name, different from any name they had ever heard before; and, like the woman who described every foreign place-name she saw in the newspapers as "a town in France," quite a number of the people of Bruree decided that since the name, de Valera, was neither Irish nor English, then, by a process of elimination it had to be French. France was still fresh in the racial memory; Spain, the older ally, was nearly forgotten.

One day, young de Valera was driving his uncle's jennet to Bruree, and as he approached the railway bridge two lads from the village clambered over the wall at the side of the road and, catching hold of the tail of the cart, climbed on to it. Village lads, as a rule, when they see one of their own age driving a cart, always want to lay irresponsible hands on the reins, and country boys, appreciating the responsibility of driving, have ever to be on their guard against them. De Valera, being an understanding country boy, was not prepared to let two village "dalteens" on to the cart; so, when they climbed on to it, he promptly dropped the reins, and ejected them by force. A local man, witnessing the happening, and enjoying the sight of two being vanquished by one, could not refrain from laughing at the discomfited pair and exclaiming, *Ha! ha! the Frenchman will do for ye!*

As he grew up, de Valera took his part with the lads of the locality in all their games and escapades. And he was not above playing a prank. David Dwane of Clogher, his neighbour and first biographer, used to tell how one day when they met at Bruree creamery, de Valera sidled over and tickled David's notorious kicking jennet. The animal nearly kicked the harness off, and a non-too-pleased David gave chase to the laughing cause of the trouble; and, though a very good runner, he was left far behind by the fleet-footed lad from Knockmore.

Sometimes, when returning from Bruree after a shopping visit, with a parcel of groceries under his arm, he would meet some of his schoolmates, who would invite him to

join them in a game of hurling or football, or in a race or high jump. At once the parcel would be laid on top of the wall or fence, or deposited in the grass; and, before many seconds, the long-legged youth from Knockmore would be in the thick of the fun. He was a fine athlete, and in his old home are preserved some of the prizes he won locally in such events as egg-and-spoon and three-legged races.

One rather chilly evening, a man from the Forty Acres was passing by the field where the lads of the district were running and jumping, and noted the lithe figure of de Valera among them. Cold though the evening was, he had stripped off for the contests, and did not seem to mind the weather. The Forty Acres man continued on his way, and called later that evening to see old Mrs. Coll. In the course of their conversation he remarked to her how fine a youth her grandson had looked in his sporting togs. The old lady said nothing then, but when the athlete came home he got "who-began-it" for having discarded his warm clothes in such cold weather. Next day, when he went to school he made his complaint to the sons of the man who had been the innocent cause of his trouble. They were horrified to hear what had happened, and when they got home they told their mother about it. When the father came in from work that night it was his turn to get "who-began-it".

"Well," said his wife, "wasn't it short of a story you were and to go and tell his grandmother about Eddie de Valera running in his togs!" And she went on to inform him of the repercussions his remarks had for the lad.

"Yerra, woman," the poor man replied, "sure I meant no harm at all; all I had in my mind was to say what a fine *garsún* Eddie is turning out to be".

Ever before he reached the end of his time in Bruree school, de Valera's reputation as a brilliant pupil had spread through the village, and beyond, reaching every home that had a representative at the school. He was, according to all accounts, "a great scholar." It was not usual in those days for lads who came from small farms or labourers' cottages to get secondary education, but Paddy Coll thought that a brainy lad should be given every opportunity of getting all the education possible, no matter how scant the acres or how few the cows his people had. And, so, when John Kelly, the principal of Bruree Boys' National School, and Father Liston, the local curate, approached him and suggested that he should send his nephew to the Christian Brothers' Secondary School at Ráthluirc, he gladly consented to do so. It is absolutely certain that that decision by Paddy Coll helped, in no small way, to shape the history of Ireland in the past forty years or so. But no one in his wildest dreamings could have imagined at that time what the future held in store for young de Valera—as we are reminded by the words of a simple poem in Irish that was read one night, some years ago, at a *Cúirt Éigse*, or Court of Poetry, in Bruree. This is the poem—brought up to date since its first reading:—

BRÚ RÍOCH

Nach beag is eol don duine beo,
D'ainneoin a léinn is gaois',
Cad déanfaidh fós an buachaill óg
A thig ina threo aon lá den bhliain.
Ag siúl an ród dom féin fadó,
Aon mhaidin fhómhair go dtí Brú Rí,
Do chas im threo ó Chnoc Mór
Garsún caol ard nár aithníos.

Níor smaoiníos riamh cad í an chríoch
Bhí réidh ag Dia Mór ina chóir,
Go mbeadh 'na thír mar threoraí fíor,
Nuair raghadh a mhuintir insa ghleo.
Sa bheárna baoil ar san a thír',
Faoi bhrat an Phiarsaigh uasail chóir,
Do nocht sé claíomh in aghaidh Sheoin Bhuí,
I mBail' Atha' Cliath um Cháisc na
d'Treon.

Is d'éis na Cásc' fuair gradam ard,
Mar Uachtarán an chine Gael;
Is leath a cháil ó lá go lá
In Éirinn áin 's i bhfad i gcéin.
Do thug dúshlán faoi mhéirligh Sheáin,
Is feara Fáil sa chath níor thréigh;
Le hintinn ard do phléigh ár gcás,
Is d'éalaigh slán as Lincoln Jail.

Do ghráigh sé fós an Ghaeilge chóir,
Do labhair ar bpór gan cuntas bliain;
Do ghráigh sé ceol na nGael 'sa nós,'
Mar maith is eol don óg is críon.
O 'Fiche-dó mhair leath scór
De bhlianta bróin is briseadh croí;
Ach i 'Tríocha-dó, ag Toghachán Mór,
Tháinig i gcomhacht in Éire 'rís.

Ní deireadh scéil an méid sin féin,
Mar san Ghinéiv i nDáil na dTír,
Bé rogha gach n-aon an ceannas 'ghéill'
D'Éamon de Valéra ó Bhrú Rí.
'Sa mhuintir féin bé toil leo féin,
'Na Uachtarán Gael ar ais arís,
An garsún ard caol, chas orm gan bhréag,
Maidin gheal ghréin' ar an ród go Brú Rí.

* * *

Seanfhear a dúirt na focail luas,
I mBaile Nua le caraid lá:
Céad moladh uainn do Rí na nDúl,
A thug an clú san do Chois Máighe.

Ráthluirc is about six miles south of Bruree, and about seven miles south of de Valera's boyhood home. He used to travel to the Christian Brothers' School by train. The train—it was the Limerick-Cork train—left Bruree early in the morning, and if he missed it, which he sometimes did, he never minded doing the whole journey on foot. In the evenings, there was a long wait for the train; and since there was a mile long tramp out to Ráthluirc station, he usually walked home when the weather was good, and would have most of his home work finished by the time the train came whistling into Bruree.

At school in Ráthluirc, the young lad from Knockmore displayed the same ability he had displayed in Bruree, and soon was noted down by the Brothers as one of the most brilliant students ever to have come their way. But this brilliant student was no labour-shirking bookworm, and never sought to avoid any of the multitudinous tasks that are part and parcel of the daily routine of a small farm. Nearly fifty years later, when an Opposition Deputy claimed in the Dáil that neither Mr. de Valera nor his ministers knew anything about farming, he drew from the Bruree man, then Taoiseach, this statement:—

> "There is not an operation on the farm, with perhaps one exception, that I as a youngster had not to perform. I lived in a labourer's cottage, but the tenant, in his way, could be regarded as a small farmer. From my earliest days I participated in every operation that took place on a farm. One thing I did not learn, how to plough, but until I was sixteen years of age there was no farm work, from the spancelling of a goat and milking of a cow, that I had not to deal with. I cleaned out the cowhouses. I followed the tumbler rake. I took my place on top of the rick. I took my place on the cart and filled the load of hay. I took milk to the creamery. I harnessed the donkey, the jennet and the horse."

The diligence with which de Valera pursued his studies at Ráthluirc was not to go unrewarded, and in 1898 he was among the exhibitioners in his school, securing a scholarship value for £60. He now went on to Blackrock College, leaving, except for holiday periods, that home beside Bruree where fourteen of his sixteen years had been fully and happily spent. Many who knew him well thought at this stage that he was destined for the priesthood. Indeed, it was some years later before he finally satisfied himself that he had not a vocation to the religious life. From Blackrock he went forward to read a brilliant university

course; and then began his teaching career in various schools and colleges, including Blackrock, Belvedere, Rockwell, U.C.D., Clonliffe and Carysfort. But when holiday time came he always returned to his old home at Knockmore—except on a few occasions when he went on shooting visits to Connacht.

He used also to spend much time fowling in the Bruree district during his holidays; and David Dwane tells us it was often remarked that he seemed to have a different fowling piece each time he came home, and that once he was heard to say:

"I'm afraid I shall be a soldier, I have such a love for guns."

On some of those Sundays that he was at home, he would travel with a companion by his uncle's jennet and cart to a sports meeting or a hurling match in Kilmallock. At that time he would take a bottle of stout, and smoke a cigarette; it was not until after Easter Week that he became a non-smoker and non-drinker. During his holidays, "nights" in his honour were always arranged in neighbours' houses by the young men of his own age.

Jer Kelleher, an old inhabitant of the district, used to tell how he called at Coll's one night to talk about a new cottage that he had been promised would be built for him two miles away, in Howardstown. Jer wasn't too keen on taking the cottage down there, but Paddy Coll, who was a member of the Kilmallock Board of Guardians, and was active in the Labour Movement, advised him to take it. Jer still wasn't decided. Young de Valera, who was in the kitchen, and had been listening to the conversation, spoke up and said to Jer: "Be said by your elders." This piece of advice settled the question, for, after that, Jer could not find it in himself to raise any further objections. Later that night, when Paddy Coll was conveying Jer a bit of the road home, he asked him laughingly: "Were you afraid to say 'No' to the schoolmaster?"

By this time, de Valera's grandmother, old Mrs. Coll, was dead, and his uncle Paddy had married, and was the father of three children, a boy named Patrick, and two daughters, May and Elizabeth. Then de Valera himself married, and now, with a home of his own in Dublin, his visits to Bruree were less frequent. He was by now an ardent Gaelic Leaguer, with a fine command of the Irish language, acquired to a large extent from Sinéad Ní Fhlannagáin, the Irish teacher who had become his wife. Soon, he was to become a prominent Irish Volunteer officer.

The years passed. The first World War was unleashed in Europe. And then came that memorable Easter Monday of 24 April, 1916, when Pearse, standing in front of Dublin's General Post Office, spoke in the name of God and the dead generations, and proclaimed the Irish Republic as a sovereign and independent state. The news reached Bruree, startling, bewildering and frightening most people. They feared this fighting, this dread clash of armed men in their own country. Yet, it all seemed remote and unreal enough. Dublin with its guns and bloodshed was a long way off; and Pearse and Connolly were names that few in the Maigue country had heard of before this.

After a few days, however, the people of Bruree received a great shock: de Valera was in the Rising; and, not alone that, but he was one of the leaders of the insurgents. In many homes in that part of County Limerick, around Bruree and Kilmallock, were men and women who still kept true to the Fenian faith, and in the hearts of these people there was quiet exultation that a local man was so prominent in this latest fight for Irish freedom. There were other people, however, who would not believe the news, and who kept on saying, "Ah, de Valera is too sensible to be mixed up in a thing like that."

But "mixed up" in it he was; and at the end of that epic week he marched at the

head of his weary, dust-covered, and smoke-begrimed men, out of Boland's Mills, the last Commandant of the Rising to surrender to the overwhelming British forces who, for days, had held Dublin in a grip of steel. The executions of the leaders began. Nothing, it seemed, could save de Valera from the fate meted out to Pearse and MacDonagh and Clarke and the others.

Early in the morning of each of those days of terrible doubt, Paddy Coll came into Bruree to get the newspaper that he always feared would carry the dread news of his nephew's execution. Then, one morning, as he hurried down the village street, he saw two girls eagerly reading a newspaper. While still some distance from them he hailed them and asked,

"Is there any news?"

"Oh, there is, indeed", they answered, "great news: he is not going to be shot; the death sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life."

Taking off his hat, the uncle blessed himself reverently, and, from the depths of his soul, uttered a very fervent "Thanks be to God!" When the general amnesty came in 1917, and de Valera stepped out of jail, he became, as the sole surviving commandant of the Rising, the acknowledged leader of an awakened and resurgent Ireland. His long public career had begun.

He had been selected to contest the Clare election, before he paid his first visit to Bruree since his release. When he arrived in his native village on Friday evening, 22 June, there was, as one would have expected, tremendous enthusiasm. The welcoming crowds pushed towards him, all eager to grasp his hand—that hand that had fought for Ireland—and to show their adherence to the cause for which so many had so recently died. In the months since the volleys of the firing squads had shattered the early morning quiet of Kilmainham's jail yard, the nation had sprung to new life, justifying the faith of the gallant few. They had

. . . fought with souls that knew not of defeat,
They could in failure shout for victory,
Though for them came no years with memories sweet,
Nor wealth of battle spoils.
A firing party and a bed of lime
Were all that fortune gave them in return,
And only with faith's ear could they discern
The songs of freedom in the coming time.

The *Limerick Leader* of Wednesday, 27 June, 1917, carried this account of de Valera's welcome home to Bruree:

"On Friday evening (writes our Kilmallock correspondent), Mr. E. de Valera visited Bruree, where he spent his boyhood, and was given a most enthusiastic reception. Contingents were present from Charleville, Kilfinane, Ballylanders, Galbally, Hospital, Bruff, Kilmallock, and districts surrounding Bruree, while bands attended from Charleville and Kilfinane, and played a selection of airs. A procession was formed, in which a number of young ladies took part, and there was a plentiful display of Republican flags.

Outside the village, Mr. de Valera was met by a large concourse of people, who greeted him in the most enthusiastic manner, while the renewal of old friendships was of the heartiest description. The horse was taken from under the car on which Mr. de Valera was seated, and it was drawn by a number of men. The procession then proceeded to the village, where he thanked the people for the warmth of the reception, and recalled his early associations with the place. He then delivered a lengthy and stirring address, which was punctuated with applause at frequent intervals. Mr. Joseph Gaffney, Kilmallock, also spoke. Mr. John A. Smyth presided. The houses in the village were illuminated."

The Joseph Gaffney mentioned in the report still lives in Kilmallock. He was a

secondary teacher, the son of a Fenian, and the great-grandson of a United Irishman, who was one of a three-man delegation that met Lord Edward Fitzgerald when he visited a house in the townland of Ballybeg, near Kilmallock, in the early part of 1798. Joe Gaffney himself was out in Easter Week, and took a very prominent part in the struggle for freedom in the years that followed. It is of interest to note that it was in the house in which his mother was born, the famous Gaelic poet, Aindrias Mac Craith ("an Mangaire Súgach") died. Joe's mother's maiden name was Hawthorne. The poet was very friendly with the Hawthornes, in whose grave in Kilmallock churchyard he now awaits the resurrection.

De Valera's opponent in the historic Clare by-election was Patrick Lynch, a well-known and popular personage, who could have smiled at the temerity of such opposition a year or two before. To a friend who came to see him off for Clare at Bruree railway station, de Valera remarked: "We are going to nail the Republic to the mast now." Travelling on the same train with him were some steel-helmeted police. They, too, were on their way to Clare, though not for the same purpose, theirs being to uphold the edifice of British rule in Ireland, which de Valera and his supporters had resolved to overthrow. That the old order was changing was proved conclusively in Clare, for de Valera won a resounding victory for the Republic, and won, for the first time, the right to sit in parliament as a representative of the people.

On Sunday, 16 September, 1917, some two months after the Clare election, the local Gaelic League branch held a great *aeríocht* in Bruree, in a field beside that in which the new Catholic church now stands. The printed programme for the day listed the speakers who were to give addresses: Commandant E. de Valera, M.I.P.; Countess Markievicz; Doctor Richard Hayes; Mr. M. Brennan, I.R.A.; Mr. Ernest Blythe; Mr. William Manahan; Mr. M. Lysaght. Since both de Valera and the Countess had been sentenced to death for their part in the Rising, their appearance on an *aeríocht* platform at that stirring period of Irish history very naturally gave rise to a wonderful display of enthusiasm.

That day showed de Valera in a new rôle in his native village, that of a public man, preaching Pearse's gospel of an Ireland free and Gaelic. Once, the people now gathered about him thought that the quiet, scholarly de Valera would be a priest; now, as he stood there before them, tall, soldierly and firm of purpose, a man whose life had, not so long ago, been declared forfeit, they must have wondered what would be the ending of the road he had chosen.

For him, and all who marched with him, that road very soon led through blood-drenched years of warfare; with a small volunteer army striking against an Empire's trained might; with hunger strikes and hangings; with lorry loads of regular soldiers, Auxiliaries and Black and Tans, roaring through terror-stricken countrysides; and with sudden volleys from behind high fences bringing death to "the foreign soldiery" and sounding the prelude of many a swift and fierce engagement. De Valera's own countryside rallied well to the standard when the call to arms came, the Bruree Volunteer company of close on a hundred men being the largest in the area of the famous East Limerick Brigade.

To all Ireland, and to the world at large, de Valera was by now the undisputed national leader; but to the people of the upper Maigue country he still was, first and foremost, a Bruree man. With pride, not unmixed with anxiety, they followed his movements in those years of a nation's agony: his imprisonment and escapes, his tours through the country to review the fighting men, his unforgettable journey to America, where he was received like a king, with salutes of guns, processions of cars and formations of planes flying overhead. They suffered with him at the Treaty

Split, and when the black shadow of civil strife fell across the land, the great majority of them still stood by him—the fighting men themselves, in that most tragic hour, stood by him almost to a man.

The tide, however, turned against him in other places; the bonds of old loyalties and friendships were smashed overnight, and a new leader was, by a very narrow majority, elected in his place by a bitterly-divided Dáil Éireann, to preside over a bitterly-divided people, in twenty-six counties of a now-divided Ireland. But in quite a few houses around Bruree there still hung in a prominent place the picture of a soldier in Volunteer uniform; and children growing up, who did not remember the 1916–'23 period, and who inquired who the soldier was, would be told that he was a nephew of old Paddy Coll, and that he once was the leader of his people, and that his name was de Valera. The name would intrigue them. And easy to understand was the erroneous assumption of some of them that de Valera was now dead, for, otherwise, how could so famous a man have disappeared from the scene.

His return to the scene in 1926 was to cause still another division among Irishmen for, while the vast majority of those who had opposed the Treaty with him came over with him into his newly-formed Fianna Fáil party, when he decided to enter the Free State parliament and attempt undo the Treaty by constitutional methods, there remained behind a small but unshakeable minority, who were utterly unwilling to recognise the Treaty or any institution of government set up by it, and who still felt bound by the oath of allegiance they had sworn to the All-Ireland Republic, and still considered themselves at war with England. Before long, it was clear that de Valera was on the way back to the helm. At the General Election, held in February, 1932, ten years after the tragic Split, his hour of triumph came, when the people again put their destinies in his hands.

His victory, as was to be expected, led to great rejoicing among his supporters in Bruree. On the night appointed to celebrate it, almost every window was bright with candles, and bonfires blazed on the hills, and on top of the old de Lacy castle in Ballynoe, and at all the crossroads. A torchlight procession, headed by violinist Jack Muirghéis, of Tankardstown, mounted on horseback, marched down the village street. Then the Con Colbert Pipe Band from Kilmallock struck up, and to the strains of Irish marching airs, the great gathering proceeded to the platform to hear addresses from many speakers, including Paddy Coll, de Valera's proud uncle.

Since that February day in 1932, when he became Head of the Twenty-Six County Government, to his election to the exalted position of President of the Republic of Ireland, the position he now enjoys, Éamon de Valera has lived a very full life. He has travelled to many lands, and met many of the world's rulers and statesmen; he has had signal honours conferred on him by Popes and Heads of States; he has presided in the Council Hall of the League of Nations at Geneva, making world headlines for his speech on the necessity for honesty, fair dealing and morality among nations, a speech that was received in stony silence by delegates who, up to this, had heard, and who wanted to hear, from those who presided at their deliberations, only innocuous platitudes—yet he has never forgotten the little Maigueside village where he grew up, or the men and women who were his neighbours there. Whenever an opportunity presents itself he pays a visit to the old spot, *an tsean áit*, as he calls it.

In 1938, Paddy Coll died. During his last illness his famous nephew, of whom he was so proud, had come to see him many times. De Valera felt his loss deeply. On the evening of the funeral to Bruree church, as he stood bareheaded at the little gate in

front of the door of his old home, his thoughts, one feels, must have flashed back to his early boyhood; to the times when his grandmother taught him his prayers in the small room in there with the altar above the bed; to the mornings he had set out from here for school in Bruree or Ráthluirc; to the happy, carefree days he had gone saving hay with the man who now lay dead. Around him, as he stood there, were many old friends and neighbours, farmers and labourers, tradesmen and small farmers, conversing with him about old times, people who more easily thought of him as one of themselves rather than as Head of the Government. That same evening, while he was attending his uncle's funeral, his Government was defeated by a majority of one in a snap division in the Dáil. A General Election followed, bringing him and his Fianna Fáil party back to power, far stronger than before.

Paddy Coll's death prompted the veteran Ulster poetess, Alice Milligan, to write, in the dead man's memory, a poem about Bruree and de Valera's association with the place. The poem recalled a very fleeting visit made by the poetess to Bruree exactly half a century earlier. The train in which she travelled that day passed within 200 yards of the house that was then home to the six-year-old de Valera. This is the poem she wrote:—

ON MUNSTER GROUND

(Remembering a visit to Bruree in 1888)

When first I stood on Munster ground
Old ruins there we went to see,
And walked to walls of Limerick round
(Three Northern men with me)
By Sarsfield Bridge and Treaty Stone
And Castle Grim to Ireton known
Our guide was Father Lee.

To Inischaltra's Island Tower
We voyaged past Kincora's place,
Askeaton next and sweet Adare
With cloisters grey and garden fair,
Lough Gur, whence came a shining shield
Some brave Dalcassian bore to field,
Against the Outland race.

Then Limerick left we went to see
Kilmallock, once a place of power,
Till came the Desmonds' fated hour;
With us still Father Lee,
Who to the Northern strangers told,
From records of the Wars of Old,
Of Tower and Monastery.
The train with never stop nor stay,
Roared past a station on the way,
And then said Father Lee:
"That was Bruree";
But had no more to say
About the place that day.

But never, after now, again
Shall traveller by road or train,
From North or South or over the main,
Pass heedless of Bruree!
For nurtured in this little place,
In kinsman's care, one by God's grace
Grew strong to set our country free!
One—of a band, for there were others,
His martyred comrades dear as brothers,
Of Easter Week. No interceders
Could pardon win for them, the leaders
Born subject to the oppressor's sway;
But he lived on, though doomed as they,
His country's conquering hour to see,
Because America over the foam
His birthplace was, but here his home
In youth. Our Nation's leader brave
He stands now by the open grave
Of guardian, teacher, patriot true,
Tried in the people's land war, too,
Round Bruree.

Besides his own relatives, de Valera had a number of special friends, school-mates and immediate neighbours, whom he always endeavoured to call on when he came to Bruree. The years have sadly reduced their number, but the few who survive know that any day a car could stop at their gate, and out of it step a former President of the League of Nations, now President of Ireland.

Old Bridge Carroll, who kept a small shop, near the cross where the by-road branched to the left to Knockmore, was one of the special friends. She was always overjoyed when she saw the tall, well-known figure in long, dark coat alight from his car and walk briskly in to see her. And to show how much she appreciated his call she never failed to produce a fistful of sweets or a couple of apples, which she would hand to her distinguished visitor, saying, "Here, be eating these in the car for yourself." And he would take them from her, as he had taken many a *tomhaisín* of sweets from the same generous old lady in his school days, and would, no doubt, enjoy the treat, as he drove away to attend to the affairs of State or Party. A *tomhaisín* (pronounced "toe-sheen"), by the way, was the local name for a cornet-shaped container that shopkeepers made by deftly folding a piece of paper, usually a piece of newspaper. Such commodities as "penn'orths" of sweets, snuff and saltpetre were invariably filled into a *tomhaisín*.

Next door to Bridge Carroll lived another old friend whom he always visited. This was Pat Joyce, who had been a monitor in Bruree school during de Valera's time there. And next door to his old home in Knockmore lived old Mrs. Sullivan, who used to delight in telling him, after he had become Taoiseach, that she could boast that one day, when he was a very small boy, she had chastised him for being cross! She, like other old friends, still called him Eddie. Half a mile further on, at Clonbrien, on the road to Athlacca, was Geoffrey Walsh and his sisters; and two hundred yards farther on still, at Dromacomer, were the three MacCarthys, Maggie, Mick and Jim. It was down at MacCarthys he first heard that famous tune, *The Fox Chase*. It was played by a piper; and ever afterwards, I once heard him say, it was to remind him of the Bruree countryside, and the friends of his boyhood who lived there.

After he had become Head of the Government, de Valera, on a number of occasions, paid informal visits to his old schools at Bruree and Ráthluirc—in the latter school he appears in a picture of a group of students that the Brothers have prominently displayed. He also visited Rockhill school, two miles west of Bruree, where his first cousin, Mrs. Meagher (née Coll) was teaching and, at the request of the principal, signed his name in the roll book. Another roll book in this school bears the signature of the essayist Robert Lynd, who visited Bruree during his honeymoon, as the guest of Garrett Hayes, one of de Valera's old and esteemed teachers. Joe Hayes, a brother of Garrett, was teaching in Rockhill at the time.

Once, during the critical days of World War II, de Valera was travelling from Bruree to Croom. Cars were few and far between in those days of drastic restrictions. Somewhere along the road a man, seeing a car approach, put up his hand seeking a drive. The car stopped, the door opened, and in he went, grateful for the lift. Imagine his surprise, however, when he found himself sitting beside the Taoiseach. But, as it turned out, he was an old acquaintance of the Taoiseach's, and soon both were deep in conversation about old times, and continued so until the traveller reached his destination near Croom.

World War I found de Valera an almost unknown insurgent captain, taking part in what seemed a hopeless fight for Irish freedom; World War II found him steering the Irish ship of state through all the deadly storms of international hate and discord that blew for those terrible six years between 1939 and 1945. The skill with which he accomplished the task he had set himself—that of preserving the neutrality of the Twenty-Six Counties—gave ample proof of his powers of leadership, and of his ability and coolness in crisis. In gratitude, that great priest whom we mourn, Monsignor Pádraig de Brún, wrote

a poem, *Don Taoiseach tar éis na Stoirme*—To the Taoiseach after the Storm. Seven times in seven stanzas he told the Taoiseach:

Do thugais slán do mhuintir féin.
You saved your people.

When, in the final phase of the war, all the other neutrals yielded to the pressure of the Allied Nations, and guaranteed that they would give no shelter to any of those whom the United States, Britain and Russia described as "war criminals," de Valera, alone of the neutral leaders, refused to give the guarantee demanded, stating that his Government was unable to give assurances that would make it impossible for it to exercise its right to grant asylum should justice, charity or the honour or interest of the nations so require.

Perhaps it was this stand of the Irish leader Bernard Shaw had in mind when, at the end of the war, he wrote:

> "The voice of the Irish gentleman, Spanish grandee, was a welcome relief from the chorus of retaliatory rancour and self-righteousness then deafening us. . . . Éamon de Valera comes out of it as a champion of the Christian chivalry we are all pretending to admire."

In a normal democratic state no political party can hope to remain in power forever; and so, sooner or later, de Valera's party was bound to go out of office. It happened in 1948 when, having failed to obtain an over-all majority at that year's General Election, Fianna Fáil was opposed by a combination of all the other parties in the Dáil, who then proceeded to form a government. De Valera's sixteen years of unbroken rule was at an end—for the time being, at any rate. He left office with many of the objectives he had set himself accomplished. Unaccomplished, however, were the two major national objectives—the restoration of the Irish language and the undoing of the Partition of Ireland.

It could be argued, of course, and perhaps rightly, that in the case of the language revival some progress had been made; but Partition, that maddening, frustrating problem, was not a whit nearer solution. To a Bruree man, whom he visited on the day of the Limerick County Feis at Bruree in 1950, de Valera confessed that, in his opinion, the restoration of the language was a far simpler problem than the ending of Partition and the re-unification of the national territory.

When the members of Bruree Gaelic League branch agreed to organise the Limerick County Feis in 1950, they decided to ask de Valera to declare the Feis open and to deliver the Feis oration. He gladly consented to do so. The date of the Feis was 25 June, a date that some will remember as the day the Korean war began; that others will remember as the day Muiris Ó Súilleabháin, author of *Fiche Bliain ag Fás*, was drowned in Galway Bay; but that Bruree men will remember as the biggest day in their history. For into their little village of some 250 inhabitants ten thousand people packed themselves that day, in order to catch one glance of the man at home among his people. He was coming back to speak in the very same field where, with Countess Markievicz, he had spoken at the historic *aeríocht* of 1917. Much had happened in the intervening thirty-three years to make his name known throughout Ireland and the world.

It was close on four o'clock when he arrived, for he had stopped on the way from Dublin to lay a wreath on Wolfe Tone's grave at Bodenstown. On the outskirts of the village he was met by a Guard of Honour of Old I.R.A., and was welcomed, on behalf of the Gaelic League, by Father D. Kelly, P.P., Bruree. Also there to welcome him were Brother Ó Cinnéide, Superior Christian Brothers' Schools, Ráthluirc; Donnchadh Ó hArgáin, Principal Bruree Boys' National School; and Canon Tomás de Bhál, P.P., Ballin-

garry, one of the two Limerick priests whom the British General, Maxwell, tried in vain to get Bishop O'Dwyer to reprimand for their nationalist activities in 1916. The bishop's famous reply to Maxwell on that occasion is now part of our history.

As the procession rounded the Maigue bridge, into the village, one noted a young lad with a banner suitably inscribed *Oró, 'Sé do Bheatha Abhaile!* Wildly cheering crowds were everywhere. This was not a political function, but a welcome home by all shades of opinion to the Bruree boy who, since that *aeríocht* day of 1917, had risen to be President of the outlawed Irish Republic, Head of the Twenty-Six County Government, and President of the League of Nations. In the intervals between acknowledging the greetings of the throngs, he was quick to notice changes in the village; old houses that had disappeared, new ones that had risen in their place. As he passed by some of the houses, he inquired if certain families he had known in his youth still resided in them.

At length, he entered the Feis field; and, as he did, ten thousand people pressed round him, giving him a rousing reception, and crying "Welcome Home!" and "*Fáilte Abhaile!*" Massed pipe bands played him to the stage; and when he ascended the stage he was greeted with a song of welcome in Irish, composed specially for the occasion by Dónal Ó Ceocháin, of Cúil Aodha, County Cork. He listened smilingly while melodic voices sang the new words that had been wed to an old Munster air, *Bacach Buí na Léige:—*

Gluaisimís go tréanmhar, gach n-aon
ar son na Gaeilge,
Is seasaimís gan staonadh le Gaelaibh
Bhrú na Rí:
Céad fáilte chun ar bhFéile roimh ár
dTreoraí daingean Gaelach,
Éamon de Valéra, an gaiscíoch linn sa
ghníomh.

Curfá:
Sin Brú Rí 'rís fíor-Ghaelach go teann
ar son na hÉireann,
An óige, meán is aosta, is áthas linn le maíomh;
Sin Brú Rí 'rís 'na Ghaeltacht le cúnamh
Máighe na hÉigse,
Brú Rí croí na hÉireann ag Gaelaibh Luimní.

Tá Brú Rí i stair na hÉireann go raibh
ríthe ann go tréitheach,
Go dtáinig námhaid an Bhéarla is
chreachadar a suíomh.
Do chanadar na héigse gan beann ar
dhlíthe péine,
D'fhág againn a saothar go teann sa litríocht.

Curfá:
Sin Brú Rí 'rís, etc.

I mBrú Rí bhíodh na héigse, an Mangaire
Súgach aerach,
Mac Craith; is Clárach faobhrach is Seán
Ó Tuama an Ghrinn.
Canaimís a saothar i dteangain bhinn na
Gaeilge,
Le hÉamon de Valéra a tháinig chughainn
'na naíon.

Curfá:
Sin Brú Rí 'rís, etc.

Molaimís ár laochra fuair bás ar son na
hÉireann,
An tÉirí Amach a 'Sé-déag a chuir Sacsa
as an slí.
Dúirt an Piarsach féinig a's é ag foghlaim
Gaeilge,
Gur d'Éire saor is Gaelach a dortfaí fuil a chroí.

Curfá:
Sin Brú Rí 'rís, etc.

Ní neart go cur le chéile, céad fáilte roimh
gach aoinne,
A thagann chughainn go Gaelach, is
cabhrú linn ó chroí.
Guíeam Éire saor is Gaelach, an Teora
bhréagach séite—
Chun Glóire Dé ár saothar san bhFéile i
mBrú Rí.

Curfá:
Sin Brú Rí 'rís, etc.

Éamon de Valera delivered no formal Feis oration when he addressed his own people in Irish and English that day in Bruree. He spoke in an intimate way.

"When I come down here," he said, "I would like very much to take time off to go, as we say in Irish, back *ar bhóithrín na smaointe*—back on the by-ways of memory. I am reminded here today of the years that have passed. It is rather frightening for me to think of them, because they can actually be counted in terms of centuries; it is a third of a century since I last spoke here. When I come here now I like to look over these fields to see what new bushes grew since I played here, to notice what trees were felled that my eyes used catch as a youngster. I like to discover what other changes took place in the district that was so familiar to me during the first sixteen years of my life."

He went on to recall how, as a young Mass server in Bruree, he had always paid great attention to the sermons Father Sheehy used to preach on the feast day of Saint Munchin, the patron of the parish. On that day Father Sheehy always told them with pride tales of Bruree's connection with Irish royalty. They were very proud in those days to learn that the progenitor of the *Dál gCais* came from Bruree; that Brian Boru and his brother Mahon had spent some time there; that in the district was a *Brú Rí*—a Fort of Kings.

"I don't know," he said, "how many of you here now call certain places around here by the names I once called them. There were some names I couldn't understand, and when I asked my grandmother for their definition I got a *leadóg faoin gcluais*. But the best place to swim in was *Poll an Easa*, a name easily understood. *Ceapach na Fairche* and *Baile na mBodach* also were easy to define. And I'll give you a hint, too," he continued, laughingly, "where the best crabs were to be found. They were to be found in *Gort a' Chailín*—the Girl's Garden or, I suppose, the Woman's Garden. I don't know if the crab trees are still standing, or if they have been cut down, but there were some fine crab trees there once. Then there was *Drom a' Chumair*—I see a Dromacomer man here before me now," he remarked, as he looked down and saw Jim MacCarthy in the press of the throng in front of the stage.

"I am wandering like this," he said, "to show you how living a link with the past the language is. The simplest place-name isn't without a meaning. All you young people who want to know your country must also know your language."

And so he went on, speaking in a homely way, yet pleading very effectively for support for the revival of that language that he first heard from his grandmother's lips in Knockmore. Then, in the evening, when the Feis was over, he availed himself of the opportunity to visit as many old friends in the district as he could think of.

In charge of the microphone and amplification system while the Feis oration was being delivered there had been a tall, quiet-spoken, red-haired young man of 22 years of age, who steadfastly refused to use a word of English with anybody. Six and a half years later, on the night of January 2, 1957, the feast day of Saint Munchin, when de Valera was delivering his next public discourse on the history and lore of Bruree, in Bruree, that red-haired young man's bullet-torn body was lying on a slab in the Fermanagh County Hospital in Enniskillen. Today, everybody in Ireland knows his name; but very few had heard of Seán Sabhat of Limerick, or could have guessed what an impact on the national consciousness he yet would make, as he stood there by the side of the Feis stage that sunny June day in 1950.

Aodh de Blácam, the well-known Ulster writer, author of *Gaelic Literature Surveyed*, was present at the Feis and though,

by then, politically estranged from de Valera, later penned a fine account of the day.

"Of all the gatherings in the last twenty years," he wrote, "that I have attended and afterwards described in words—those grey images of our multi-coloured land—few have stirred me like the Feis at Bruree, when the days of the bards came back, and Gaelic life throbbed again. Not in the thronged Feis field alone, but on the roads for a mile around, and in every house there was the joy of Ireland; as you went through the little town, fiddles were going in the houses and the voices of merry companies came forth in song—*Drong ag imeacht is Drong ag teacht;* just such an occasion would warm the heart of Egan Ó Rahilly or the poets of the Maigue.

"The distinguished son of Bruree who was the chief guest and speaker looked happy, well, content and at home. Well he might, when *cléir is tuath* of his own folk welcomed him as one of themselves; some of them had been at school with him in that stone schoolhouse, now hung with the pictures of Ireland and packed to the roof with *nua gacha bidh agus sean gacha mineral water*. The people were welcoming their own son, and I daresay what they had in mind was just this—'Study and toil, battle in Easter Week; jail, exile, jail again; the years of racking endeavour and strain; all the strife that makes up modern politics—all this, good and bad, we have gone through in our generation for a purpose far seen and steadfastly pursued, but seldom realised. That purpose was: that the men of Ireland shall thrive again in their own fields and villages, and shall renew at the traditional hostings their olden being, their olden songs, their olden tongue and faith and memories.'

"This day at Bruree was *realisation*.

"They welcomed him with song, a song made in his honour; and the music has lilted in my mind ever since those sweet voices sent it forth on the Munster air:

Céad fáilte chun ar bhFéile roimh ár
dTeorraí daingean Gaelach,
Éamon de Valéra, an gaiscíoch linn sa
ghníomh.

"That is the thing I would like to see at every feis in all our island; the best men of the country, whatever their parties or politics, as long as they *were* the men of the country, welcomed by the whole community in Gaelic song."

"And talking of song," continued Aodh de Blácam, "I am reminded of another such gathering, of which I have a story to tell.

"It was at Ardmore in the Decies, about a dozen years ago, just at time, by the way, when the Banking Commission's enormous Report was new from the printers. A bard of Ardmore composed a Gaelic poem of welcome to the Head of the Government, who was the chief guest on that occasion, too, and slept at night in a little room in the college like a monastic cell. The *fáiltiú* was read in rolling Gaelic word music, and admired; and he in whose honour it was made accepted the script and returned thanks.

"Next morning, I (*moi qui vous parle*) asked for the script, in order that I might send it to Dublin to be printed. It could not be found. Up we went to that austere cell and we ransacked it, in vain. The locked leather attaché-case of the Head of the Government was opened, and every compartment in it searched.

"Was the poem lost?

"Well, to cut short a morning's work—we found it. The Banking Commission's Report had been the statesman's last concern overnight. When our gathering had ended, our songs fallen silent and the dancers dispersed, he had sat up in his cell, working for Ireland with tables and figures; and sometime in the small hours he had taken a folded paper to serve as bookmark.

"The poetry was wedged into a page of statistics! Truly, a parable. . . . For I knew an editor once who used to say that the

recipe for a good leading article was: 'Pathos, humour and statistics'—and Ireland, it seems, requires of us Reports as well as Poems, facts as well as music; but both to the one end as Davis told us long ago:

Oh, 'tis for this we work and strive and
knowledge seek to glean,
That we may bring the foreign Red
below our Irish Green."

In 1951, the Fianna Fáil Party was again returned to office, and de Valera began another term as Head of Government. Another General Election took place in May, 1954. The west Limerick Dáil constituency, in which Bruree is now placed, continued to give its unchanging two-to-one support to Fianna Fáil; but elsewhere things were different, and the Party, failing to get an over-all majority, went out of office. The following year there was a by-election in west Limerick and during the pre-election campaign de Valera spoke in Bruree. He addressed the people after they had come out from Mass on Sunday, 30 October, and recalled that he had last addressed a political meeting in the place on the eve of the Clare election in 1917. But his speech in Bruree on 30 October, 1955, could scarcely be classed as a Party speech. He did appeal for support for the Fianna Fáil candidate at the election; but then he went on to point out some of the changes the events of the previous forty years or so had brought, even to Bruree.

In his boyhood days, he said, the Constabulary patrolled the town in pairs, with carbines slung on their backs, and lessons in the school books were designed to make them glory in the achievements of the British Empire.

Appealing for the restoration of the Irish language, he said:

> "It is the bond that kept our people together throughout the centuries, and enabled them to resist all the efforts to make them English. It would be useful to us in that way today, when we have poured in upon us, from every direction, influences which are contrary to the traditional views and hopes of our people. The biggest thing that could be done for our nation is to restore the language. If you do that, the other things will be added to you. . . .
>
> "It is on the character of our people that this nation will be built, and that character consists of very simple things, earnestness in our work, honesty and truthfulness."

The by-election was won by the Fianna Fáil candidate.

It was because Father Sheehy, the famous Land League priest, had so often spoken on the feast of Saint Munchin about the past greatness of Bruree, that de Valera chose Saint Munchin's Day, 1957, to come to Bruree, to give a lecture on the history and lore of the place. The local Fianna Fáil Cumann made the necessary arrangements for the lecture, which was delivered in the Maigue Hall. This building was formerly the Catholic church, which had been built in 1832, and replaced by a very beautiful new church in 1925, and in it the boy de Valera had served Mass for Father Sheehy.

De Valera spoke for approximately an hour and a half, without notes of any kind, but depending solely on his wonderful memory for the scores of names and dates that came to his lips without a moment's hesitation. He told his very large audience that what he had to say would not really be a lecture so much as a series of recollections, "a recalling of things I heard in this very spot some 65 years ago."

At that time, he said, both parish priest and curate resided at Rockhill, in the western half of the parish, and Mass was celebrated in Bruree only on Sundays and holydays of obligation. The one exception was 2 January, the feast of Saint Munchin, the patron of the parish, when Mass was

always celebrated in Bruree. This being a slack time of the year, with little or no farm work to be done, the day was considered more or less a parish holiday. Frequently, a special preacher was brought in from an outside parish on that day and, though many of these preachers were very eloquent, one remembered only the manner of their speaking, not the matter of it. But whenever Father Sheehy preached a Saint Munchin's Day sermon you remembered all that he said. "He made us," said de Valera, "very proud of Bruree; made us feel that we were, in the words of Saint Paul, 'citizens of no mean city.' When he spoke of Oilioll Ollum, and of Bruree being a seat of kings, we thought of the place as second to Cashel or Tara."

De Valera, in his discourse, gave it as his opinion that the old royal forts were those known as the Raheens, which are situated beside the main road, a few hundred yards west of Bruree. He told how, as a schoolboy, he had frequently explored them with a companion, and how when the explorations were over, they would kneel on the grass, looking for *prátaí clúracáin* (pig-nuts). "I passed by there today," he continued, "and tried to discover through other eyes if those old forts still looked the same as they did in my boyhood."

Then he told how, in 1932, when he became Head of Government, and when funds were being made available for archaeological excavation, he had hoped that the Bruree forts would be among those excavated, but was told that it would be too big an undertaking. He next spoke of Knockduha, the very conspicuous mound or tumulus that stands beside the old "High Road" leading from Bruree to Rockhill, and said that he had climbed it almost every time he had travelled that road. There was one wind-swept bush on the left side of the mound which used to remind him of a feather on a lady's hat; and on top of the mound was a standing stone. "That is another place," he remarked, "that I'd like to see excavated."

Having spoken of the Uí Fidhgheinte, the people who once occupied the district, and, indeed, the greater part of County Limerick, he went on to speak of Saint Munchin, and then of Donovan, the ruling chief at Bruree who, in 977, was involved in the murder of Mahon, brother of Brian Boru. Then it was of the de Lacys he spoke, and of the castles they built at Bruree. That at Lottera Lower, he described as an extraordinary castle, and said there were few like it in the country, with its high surrounding wall and its two (formerly there were three) strong towers. Of the castle in Ballynoe—that in the churchyard just on the outskirts of the village—he had an amusing tale to tell. Once, during his schooldays in Bruree, he was sent by the master to spy the coming of the school inspector, and chose as his look-out post the top of the castle in Ballynoe, which was just across the Maigue bridge from the school. With the eye of memory he could still see the inspector as he saw him that day, approaching on a side car over the High Road near Knockduha.

Dealing further with his schooldays, he told how he remembered the celebrations held in Bruree to mark the victory of Galteemore in the English Derby of 1897; the morning after the celebrations, when he was on his way to school, a bonfire was still smouldering on top of the castle in the churchyard. Galteemore was owned by John Gubbins of Bruree House, who also owned Ardpatrick, winner of the 1902 Derby. It was told of one of these Gubbinses that, during a charge in the Crimean War, he sheathed his sword and drew his blackthorn instead.

Mention of the drawing of the blackthorn led the lecturer to speak of faction fighting, for which the Irish people had been much condemned. But it should be borne in mind, he said, that this method of settling disputes was not confined to those

described as the peasantry; for the gentry in that age resorted to duelling to settle their private grievances. Individuals and groups of people, he continued, no longer seek to settle their disputes by personal conflicts; only nations do that now. But, he added, let us hope the nations will soon do as the people have done.

De Valera then recalled the first political meeting he had ever attended. It was a meeting held in Bruree, in August, 1886, to support the boycotting of John Gubbins, because of some evictions he had carried out on his estate at Garrouse. The chief advocate of the boycott, about the merits of which there were mixed views in the district, was the fiery Father Sheehy. The four-year-old de Valera, who had been taken to Bruree by his grandmother, viewed the proceedings from behind the window of a house, next to Sam Lee's pub, in Mill Street, and was, as he told 71 years later in his lecture, far more interested in watching the Fedamore big drum than in all else that went on.

The lecturer told how when, on 25 November, 1913, he entered the hall in which the historic Rotunda meeting that launched the Irish Volunteers was taking place, one of the first persons he saw there was Father Sheehy, his old parish priest. Father Sheehy was then living in retirement in Dublin—he made his way to the G.P.O. in Easter Week, to bring spiritual consolation to the fighting men. Also at that Rotunda meeting was another man from the Bruree countryside, Larry Roche of Ballynamuddaugh. Later, Larry Roche sided with the National Volunteers, joined the British Army, fought in the first World War, and rose to the rank of Major.

Still in the mood for reminiscing, de Valera recalled the times when he and other young lads had gone swimming to one or other of the two well-known pools in the Maigue—Langlow and Powlowlster; only the hardier spirits, however, ventured into Poll 'n Easa, near the waterfall.

"I would like to speak of the changes that have occurred in the sixty-five odd years since I was here," he told his listeners. "I would like if we could bring back parts of the old life I knew here," he added, "but there were other parts that were not so good.

"We had two tailors' shops; we had shoemakers, dressmakers, stone masons, thatchers, carpenters, smiths—one of the latter being described in Irish as the *Gabha* Byrnes. Johnny Connors was a shoemaker who had a great knowledge of Irish history. And there were no better storytellers than John and Jim Connolly." And then he told how on a liner on which he was returning from America to Ireland, with the late Father O'Flanagan, there was among the passengers the Donegal author and *seanchaí*, Seumas MacManus. Father O'Flanagan introduced them.

"If you want to get good folk tales go down to Bruree to the Connollys," de Valera told him.

"The Connollys!" said the other in amazement—for he had never thought of de Valera as a Bruree man—"why, one of my best stories came from John Connolly of Bruree—he was a journeyman tailor who used to come up all the way to my native Tanatalann in Donegal."

"I wouldn't be allowed out at night to hear the storytelling," de Valera told his audience, "but Tim Hannan used to go out, and at school he'd tell us the stories he had heard the night before from Jim Connolly; one of these was the story of *Séadna*, in English".

Tim Hannan, who was one of de Valera's classmates, became a teacher, and for a dozen years or so before his death contributed a racy and very readable column to the *Limerick Leader*, under the pen name "Rambling Thady."

I might remark that Seumas MacManus wrote at some length in *The Irish Press*, in 1937, of the meeting he had with the Irish leader aboard ship, when the

Connollys were remembered and discussed. Immediately that he landed at Cobh, Seumas bought a car, and drove to Bruree to meet the Connollys. Alas, both were by then dead and gone, but their fame was still very much alive. One of John Connolly's tales is to be found in Seumas MacManus's book of folk tales, *Heavy Hangs the Golden Grain*. To the present writer the author of that book once wrote: "You can say I remember John with great affection—shall never forget him. I'd have given a great deal to have known Jim, who was *the* storyteller of them."

Telling of some of the many changes he had seen taking place, de Valera said that night in Bruree's Maigue Hall: "I was at a sports meeting here in Bruree at which there was a race for the 'penny-farthing' bicycles; I saw the solid tyre in use, and the arrival of the pneumatic tyre."

And again recalling the old life in Bruree, he said: "We had here, then, a little self-sufficing community, a very pleasant community. It was a pleasant life for those who were able to make a living."

Then, in a final declaration, as he concluded his lecture, he said, very simply and sincerely: "Bruree, of course, is a place for which I have, and shall always have, a very special affection."

Just a little over two months after the Bruree lecture, Fianna Fáil was back in power, and, once again, de Valera was Head of Government.

Perhaps it would be true to say that throughout his lifetime Éamon de Valera has, to a large extent, remained at heart a Bruree man. The people of Bruree themselves are, of course, far more aware of this fact than are the people of any other part of Ireland, for they know just how frequent, all through the years, and right up to the present, have been his visits to his old home; and they know how he has always maintained friendly contact with all the old neighbours; and how he has forged new friendships with families that have come to the district since he spent his boyhood there. With the passing of the years, Bruree seems to mean more and more to him.

When he was having his eyes treated in a Utrecht clinic in October, 1951, he was reported in the newspapers at the time as having spent a considerable time reminiscing with visitors from Ireland about his youth in Bruree. At the end of August, 1956, he spent three or four days in the district; and there were few houses within a two-mile radius of his boyhood home in which still lived any members of a family he had known that he did not visit. Of old Paddy Coll's children, Paddy, Elizabeth and May, there lives now in the district only Elizabeth (now Mrs. Meagher). Paddy is dead; and May is in America.

Éamon de Valera was to retain office as Taoiseach until June, 1959, when he was elected President of Ireland. His election to the highest office in the land, which election seemed to ignore the boundaries of Party politics, was the people's tribute to a man who had given a long lifetime of unselfish and distinguished service to the nation. In Bruree, when the result was known, you could sense the pride of the people, pride in the great honour accorded to a well-loved leader—and tremendous pride in the never-forgotten fact that he was one of themselves.