AN APRIL INCIDENT

by Tim Lehane

“I wouldn’t stay here much longer”.
Silence.
“What does the weather be like in Nenagh?”
“Ah tis good — tis good in Nenagh”.
Silence.
“She should be out soon”.
“She should”.

Later that evening as I walked through Limerick’s hometime traffic and bustle I saw Josie again. The familiar figure moving his own slow way; wondering perhaps if he too shouldn’t try Nenagh, a far off world of promise. He disappeared into the crowds. A pulse of Limerick life lost in the surge of an April evening.

A strategic position. Picture by Marion Hartnett.
poration bashed in its roof on top of him. Later he went to live in a laneway near Barrington's Hospital, before crossing the Abbey river to the Simon Community Hostel at Charlotte Quay.

Josie was a man of regular habits and seldom strayed from his beat of sympathetic religious houses and other friendly sources. During less prosperous times he could be seen as one of a weekly Thursday queue at the rear of the Dominican Church, as he waited patiently for the priest's "little help" of six (old) pence. Josie had never been known to badger or harass anybody for money or anything else. Occasionally, however, when all his sources had run dry, he had been known to proffer on empty tobacco-pouch or an upturned palm to a likely passer-by.

Sean Bourke tells how he was strolling past the Dominican Church one day when he met Josie. Dipping his hand into his pocket, he pulled out three two-shilling pieces and offered them to his fellow-Limerickman, Josie looked hard at him and after a slow appraisal said, "You can't afford all that", and promptly handed back two of the three silver pieces.

Josie added a few more attractions to his outfit in his latter years. A bulging bag of his prized possessions and a tin box containing a few cigarettes were among these additions. But the most obvious possession of all was his "poor man's flock" — a small pack of dogs of mixed pedigree, frequently to be seen trailing expectantly along behind him.

Still, Josie's pride and joy continued to be his pipe-smoking achievements. He was never nominated for the "Pipeman of the Year" award but it is difficult to believe that the records of Jack Lynch and other winning notables match Josie's prowess and sense of fulfilment in this, his favourite pastime.

During the long, hard winter of 1963, a rumour went about that Josie had been found dead in a room in Mungret Street. However, anyone knowing anything about the man's onion-like ensemble knew better. But the need of crossing a road presented the greatest risk to his life and limb. His habit of suddenly stepping off the footpath and walking diagonally across the road, oblivious of traffic of any kind, put the driving skills of many motorists to the full test.

He died suddenly and peacefully in 1978 without ever having compromised his life-long refusal to participate in the economic competition of society. It is certain that the world would be a strife-free and tranquil place if all its people were as peaceful as the man with the ill-chosen nickname — "Mad" Josie.