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# Jim 'Packet' O'Halloran ~

## THE SINGING TRIPE KING

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Treacy's packet and tripe shop has long been a familiar Limerick institution. Of the various proprietors of the premises Jim "Packet" O'Halloran was easily the most colourful and best known. At first glance perhaps, "Jim Packet" might have appeared to be an unlikely owner of a packet and tripe "factory"—for singing and music were his first and last loves. But, be that as it may, it was his tripe rather than his voice that won him fame. Fifty or sixty years ago, as he daily walked the two-mile journey from his Ennis Road home to his shop at Courthouse Lane, he was recognised and greeted by all and sundry. And why wouldn't he? After all, as the wealthy, reigning monarch of one of Limerick's staple industries, whose name had become synonymous with the famous dish itself, he felt well entitled to bask in his own limelight and the approbation of his fellow-citizens.

"Jim Packet", the name by which O'Halloran was known to the children of the St. Mary's district, was, during World War 1, the country's only official offals contractor to the British Government in London. Every Monday morning at 10 o'clock a horse and float, bearing twelve or fifteen 20-gallon tankards, chock full with tripe, packet, reeds and trotters, would leave for the G.S. & W.R. station, Limerick, en route to "Blighty". In return, a fat cheque in a long, narrow manilla envelope, bearing the letters of O.H.M.S., would arrive at the end of each month at an accommodation address at Athlunkard Street, to be collected later by O'Halloran.

The labour force employed at the "factory" consisted of eight or nine women and a man, styled "collector and deliverer". The women worked in the uncovered factory yard, washing and cutting the bellies of sheep and cattle strewn all over the place. The women used canvas sacks as aprons and wore hobbled-nailed boots in the course of their all the year round work of preparing the packet, tripe and trotters. They worked hard and long but were amongst the lowest paid workers in the city.

The collector did the rounds of every slaughter-house in the city where he collected bellies, guts and blood. On one occasion, when passing William Street Royal Irish Constabulary Barracks, and having a few half-ones in him (the gift of some butcher), he started to wallop the float's mudguard with an ash plant, shouting at the same time, "Out for blood! Out for blood!" Immediately two Black and Tans rushed out and, with rifle butts, began to beat the bemused man. Fortunately, an R.I.C. sergeant, the notorious ebullient Horan came on the scene and intervened to save the collector from further damage.

Jim O'Halloran liked all about him to know that he was a great lover of music—and so he was. He would boast about this love, especially when the shop was full. He was certainly the proud possessor of a rich baritone

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THE MAN WHO MADE A FORTUNE  
OUT OF SHEEP'S OFFAL

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by *W.W. Gleeson*

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voice, which was put to best effect when, in High C, he could be heard at the Island Corner shouting: "Hannah Reddan, 'tis 3 o'clock on this fine sunny Saturday afternoon and there isn't a belly in the house scraped yet!"

"Jim Packet" loved opera best of all, especially the lighter and comic kind, and visited Dublin annually to enjoy the full season of Gilbert and Sullivan, presented by the D'Oyly Carte Company. At home he seldom missed a performance, whether at the Theatre Royal or the Coliseum. His favourite singers were Frank Land, Joseph O'Mara and Eric James. Oftentimes, during "working hours", he could be heard singing excerpts from *The Lily of Killarney*, *Faust*, *La Tosca* and *Rigoletto*, from which latter he would recite the Jester's piece: "He laid a father's curse on me."

Jim O'Halloran has long passed on; so too, with one exception, have all those workers of half-a-century or more ago who slaved to make a living in the "good" old days. One sole survivor lives out the last stage of her lone life in the relative comfort of the Limerick Corporation houses for old people at Vizes Field. Her packet and tripe story is unlikely to be ever featured on *This Is Your Life*, for it is now a forgotten chapter of Limerick history...and more is the pity.

Today, under the ownership of the Mullane family, Treacy's packet and tripe shop still does a busy trade, especially at weekends. But Joe Mullane will never make enough money to emulate his predecessor by donating a set of Stations of the Cross to St. Mary's Church. (The thought that some of the money made from the long, difficult and dirty labour of the women workers could have been spent on improving their wages and working conditions never, apparently, crossed anybody's mind.)

Treacy's premises have been modernised by the present proprietors but the buildings retain much of their old character. Joe Mullane and other members of his family now do most of the rough work of preparing the packet and tripe. "Jim Packet's" baritone voice no longer entertains the customers but his name and memory will live on while packet and tripe retains its popularity as a distinctive Limerick dish.

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hit the American customs officers when they opened the trunk at Kennedy Airport a few days later is best left to the imagination. When the dejected painter made his unscheduled return to Limerick without his trunk, his enraged wife berated him badly for his pains.

Oil from Treacy's trotters was also sold on the premises as a hair restorative. It is unlikely that this oil was effective in restoring hair but it must have made

some colourful patterns on pillowcases. Still, it was a privileged Limerick man who could sit down to a Saturday tea of grilled reed, followed by a half-a-dozen pints at Angela Conway's, then go home to a late night packet and tripe supper and wake up to a Sunday morning breakfast of cold boiled trotters. The packet and tripe culture had its limitations, but in the poverty-stricken Limerick of the time it could, at least, be said that it helped to make life a little bit more bearable for many people.