

Limerick town

Here I've got you, Philip Desmond, standing in the market-place,
'Mid the farmers and the corn sacks, and the hay in either space,
Near the fruit stalls, and the women knitting socks and selling lace.

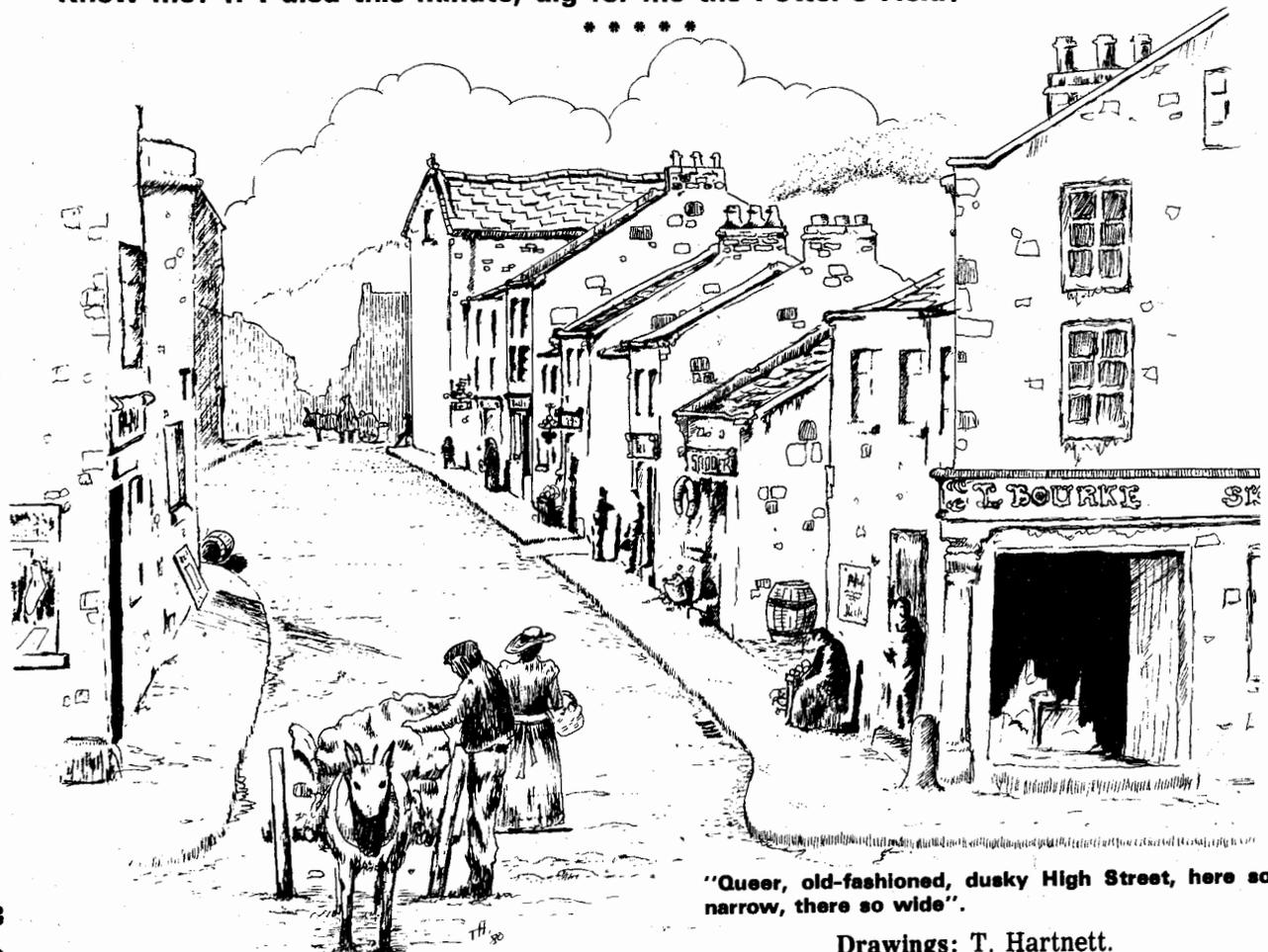
There is High Street up the hillside, twenty shops on either side,
Queer, old-fashioned, dusky High Street, here so narrow, there so wide,
Whips and harness, saddles, signboards, hanging out in quiet pride.

Up and down the noisy highway, how the market people go!
Country girls in Turkey kerchiefs — poppies moving to and fro—
Frieze-clad fathers, great in buttons, brass and watch seals all a-show.

Merry, merry are their voices, Philip Desmond, unto me,
Dear the mellow Munster accent, with its intermittent glee;
Dear the blue cloaks, and the grey coats, things I long have longed to see.

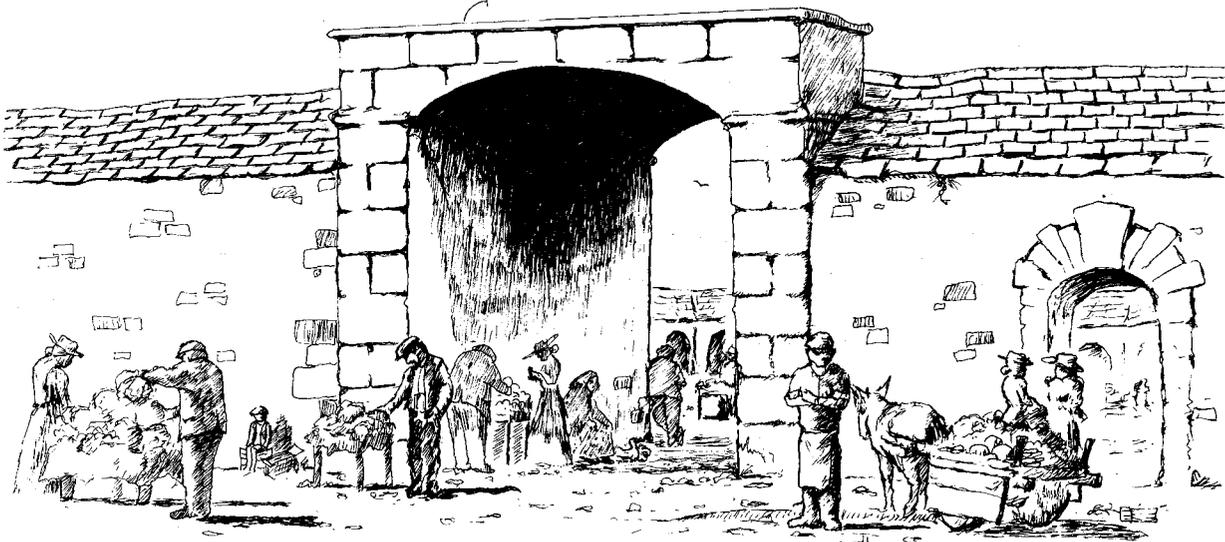
Even the curses, adjurations, in my senses sound like rhyme,
And the great, rough-throated laughter of that peasant in his prime,
Winking from the grassbound cart-shaft, brings me back the other time.

Not a soul, observe you, knows me, not a friend a hand will yield,
Would they know, if to the landmarks all around them I appealed?
Know me? If I died this minute, dig for me the Potter's Field!



"Queer, old-fashioned, dusky High Street, here so narrow, there so wide".

Drawings: T. Hartnett.



"In the market-place, mid the farmers and the corn stacks."

'Pshaw! you're prosy'. Am I prosy? Mark you then this sunward flight:
I have seen this street and roof tops ambered in the morning's light,
Golden in the deep of noonday, crimson on the marge of night.

Continents of gorgeous cloudland, argosies of blue and flame,
With the sea-wind's even pressure, o'er this roaring faubourg came.
This is fine supernal nonsense. Look, it puts my cheek to shame!

Come, I want a storm of gossip, pleasant jests and ancient chat;
At that dusky doorway yonder my grandfather smoked and sat,
Tendrils of the wind-blown clover sticking in his broad-leafed hat.

There he sat and read his paper, Fancy I recall him now!
All the shadow of the house front slanting up from knee to brow;
Critic he of far convulsions, keen-eyed judge of sheep and cow.

Now he lives in God's good judgments. Ah 'twas much he thought of me,
Laughing gravely at my questions, as I sat upon his knee—
As I trifled with his watch seal, red carbuncle fair to see.

Many a night from race and market down this street six brothers strode,
Finer, blighter, truer fellows never barred a country road.
Shouting, wheeling, fighting, scorning watchman's law and borough code.

Rolled the waggons, swore the carters, outside in the crowded street,
Horses reared and cattle stumbled, dogs barked high from loads of wheat;
But inside the room was pleasant, and the air with thyme was sweet.

Others now are in their places, honest folks who know us not;
Do I chafe at the transition? Philip 'tis the common lot —
Do your duty, live your lifetime, say your prayers and be forgot.

JOHN FRANCIS O'DONNELL

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