
MIKE DANAGHER

by Kevin Hannan



Mike Danagher, from a drawing by Kevin Hannan.

Mike Danagher might have stepped out of the frame of an old family portrait, yet he was such a familiar sight that no one gave him a second glance. Except for his massive stature, he was regarded as being no different from any other Parkman bringing his vegetables to town. Admittedly he looked way out of proportion to the size of his unfortunate donkey, whose back was shaped like a horizontal crescent from the sheer weight pressing directly on the straddle, the top of which was lower than a line drawn between the animal's rump and shoulders. On closer scrutiny, however, the attentive observer might have noticed the last frock coat and "full fall" trousers worn in public in Limerick. Though the suit was a relic of bygone days, the wearer never disrespected or desecrated it and always wore a bowler hat — never a cap, which would certainly have brought his sartorial splendour down to the level of Oxford bags!

This was an historical figure who was to be seen plying his venerable trade up to the 'sixties. He brought the past into the future, as it were, and, in a rapidly changing fashion world, continued to array himself in a style that was popular when the Young Irelanders were young. Like many of his contemporaries in the ancient territory, he was reluctant to alter a way of life that was good enough

for his father. The little plots, so intimately familiar to him since his boyhood, were almost as prolific as ever. Donkeys were much the same in shape and temperament, and the alder trees were only a little more gnarled. Like everything else around him, the clawhammer coat and full fall trousers had claims to antiquity and Mike Danagher was not the man to deny them.

Though his only mode of maintaining the forward movement of his heavily-burdened donkey, especially on the long incline at the approach to O'Dwyer's Bridge, was the vigorous application of a short wattle on the tortured and unsteady flanks it was not a conscious act of cruelty. Animals, especially donkeys, were regarded as beasts of burden, having no feelings or frailties, to be used as God-made machines for man's benefit. In the absence of a common language, the Park people used the butt end of an ash plant as a means of communication between man and beast, and more importantly, as the only means of maintaining locomotion. Even where some slight semblance of emotional attachment developed between owner and animal, the traction of the loaded cart always remained the first and utmost consideration.

Mike Danagher, the archetypal Parkman, was born into and merely continued this age-old tradition.