

The Reminiscences of Dave Flynn of Mountcollins, Co. Limerick

Dave Flynn was born in a house on a hill over the village of Mountcollins in the county of Limerick. He was the eldest of what was to be a very large family. The townland in which he was born was called the Gate. It was a small townland, on a hill, in hill country. It encompassed a few miles of countryside that at that time had only four or five houses. Most of the townlands in this upland, remote area had, and still have, Irish names. It was, and still is to some extent, a very traditional and Gaelic part of the country. Up until recent times, and indeed in the very time of writing, words from the Irish language live on in common conversation and sprinkle common speech of the people. The last native Irish speaker in the area, the Tailor Roche, only passed away in the early nineteen sixties.

This gate that gave the little townland its name was something very practical. It was erected to prevent cattle from straying off the hill and wandering down to the village of Mountcollins that straggled along the valley below. The gate had been erected between two houses, the house of Tom Sheehan and the house of Mickeen Mike Healy. The townland itself was small, extending for a distance of three or four miles. On the northern side there was a little stream that formed the demarcation line, and the southern boundary line was the not-to-be-forgotten gate.

In times past there were six or eight houses in the townland, the Gate. One of these was Flynn's house, the house of Nell and Jer Flynn. Jer was a stonemason by trade. His wife, Nell, was a musician and storyteller, a reader of books, a most intelligent and interesting woman.

A short bohereen went from the road above to the house in the trees. It was narrow, not much wider than a path. There was a high ditch on one side and a thick grove of pine trees on the other side, or palm trees as they were always called in that part of the country. These high trees greatly darkened the house, and the house itself, which was quite small, was surrounded by shrubs, flowering bushes

by Pat Feeley

and flowerbeds that, in one way or another, denied light to the windows. But inside, it was still a most pleasant and curious house. The smell of freshly baked soda bread often suffused the kitchen and we waited impatiently to be offered a triangle dripping with butter. There was a press under the stairs crammed with books. I first went there looking for books and stayed for the music and the other-worldliness of the place. The little house was alive to music. Often as you came down the path, you could hear the music drifting on the air. Sometimes it was the music of a melodeon or an accordion. At that time the accordion was new to many of the country musicians. The instruments were coming from abroad and there was a quiet debate as to whether or not they suited the Irish music. There were metal hooks in the brown tongued and grooved ceiling and musical instruments, a mandolin or a bouzouki, often dangled from crooks in the ceiling.

Dave Flynn: We had a thatched house first, and as the family got bigger, we had to enlarge the house. While that work was going on, we moved to a house in the village and we lived there. My father and my grandfather reconstructed the house and made a two-storey house out of it. We lived there the remainder of our school-days. There were two big rooms upstairs and a big room downstairs and a kitchen. They were all fairly big. There would be two double beds, maybe even three double beds in some of the rooms, for the family was very big.

My mother's side of the family were all musicians. They followed up the traditional music and they played it from morning to night. My uncle, Dáithin Davy, played almost every instrument. But he was best on the accordion. My mother, his sister, played an accordion too. But she also played a few tunes on the fiddle, that fiddle was hanging on the wall for years."

"I got an old mandolin banjo that was hanging on the wall too. But as kids we

never learned music as such. It was just there. I can see my brother, Dan, sitting on the steps of the stairs and he wouldn't be more than two and a half years old and he having the accordion up on his two knees and you'd hardly see him behind it. And he'd bring tunes out of it."

We'd go to an old dance and we'd hear a new tune, and we'd go home to bed and maybe in the middle of the night that tune would be running through the head and we'd get up and try playing it. We'd whistle it low and we'd get up and come down the stairs and play that tune. My father and mother would take no notice of us, and we'd play it again so that we'd remember it the following day. It was no bother to us to pick up music. We'd only have to hear it a couple of times and we'd know it. You could find any instrument in our house from a balalaika to an accordion. We'd try to play anything. We could knock music out of a tin whistle, or a mouth organ. We often played for sets with the mouth organ. The dances in those days were mostly polka sets, eight hand reels, *The Girl I Left Behind Me* and *Hurry the Jug*. I used to play all of those on the mouth organ.

My mother kept her books in an alcove under the stairs. I can't remember the books that she had. She used to read the old writers: Dickens, Canon Sheehan, Mrs Henry Woods, Sir Walter Scott. I started reading very young. I think the first book that I read was "Knocknagow or The Homes of Tipperary." We used read cowboy books, of course. We all thought we were cowboys, in our young days. We couldn't get enough of them.

We had an open fire for a long time. I remember when we put in the range. My mother never liked it. She used to call it "that lump of iron." She had no *meas* on it at all. We had great times with the open fire. There was a long old stool near the fire. All the neighbours around came rambling at night. They would come from the village and from as far away as Knockulcare. Jack Mickeen would come and Mick Jumber Curtin. A whole *slua* of them. Everyone would have to sit around the fire. Any tune you'd want to play, she'd

diddle it. She would jig it away to herself in the corner. We often danced to the diddling of my mother and of others that would be in the house. We used to spend a lot of time at my mother's house.

But we used also go from house to house, rambling, singing and dancing. We used to go to Paddy Begley's house at the Glosa. Paddy used to play the fiddle. Sometimes we would carry a couple of girls with us, and there were two daughters of Paddy's who were good dancers. We would dance there until eleven or half eleven and we would come home again through the fields in the dark. We used have to cross swamps and boggy patches and we did that without any flash lamps or lights. We were like owls in the night. This was all when I was growing up. We used tell fairy stories and ghost stories and some of the young people would be afraid as they believed in ghosts and fairies. Then we would run through the bog and throw up balls of phosphorous light. The phosphorous would light up the sky in a ball of light every time we would hit the bog with the heels of our boots. We would frighten the lives out of some of the boys and girls, who wouldn't know how we did it. We had to make our own fun. But, I think, we enjoyed ourselves better than the young men of today. We had no pressures on us in those carefree days. Life was simple. Those were the happiest days of my life.

My mother used make squares on the griddle. She would put in a pinch of yellow meal through the flour. We used eat them hot off the griddle with tea or milk. Ah sure they were grand. You wouldn't be hungry for hours after them. Sure you would get nothing like them today. You would eat them with butter if you had butter. But if we hadn't the butter we would eat them without it. Lovely hot squares.

My uncle, Mike, had spent more than forty years in England. He was a navvy, a long distance man. He travelled all over England, Scotland and Wales, following the work as it went from one part of Britain to another. He worked with all the big contractors. He came back to Mountcollins when he could no longer do the work and he lived in the house at the Gate. After all his hard work, he did not even have a house of his own.

When I first went to England, the long distance men were fading out, but they were still to be seen on the road. You would always know them. They wore the moleskin trousers. They had leather straps under their knees to keep the pants pulled up so that the knees of the trousers would not get worn. They had their handkerchief on a bit of a stick and they would have their grub inside in it. They would usually wear a coat with a big pocket, known as a moocher's pocket. This was a big, inside pocket, the whole lower part of the coat would be taken up with it. They used to carry in it their shaving gear and all their worldly goods. All was carried in that pocket. They

travelled from one town to another. Sometimes they jumped a train. Then the railmen would try to get them off. But generally they walked from one town to another. There would be stops along the road. At spring wells, they would get water. They would leave their billycans there sometimes, hanging on the branch of a tree. It would be left there for the next person that would come along and need a can. They would know that others would be on the road and coming to the same place and they would leave vessels and cooking utensils at the well. They usually carried with them a little pot, a warmer and a small saucepan. With these they would make the shackle. They would go into a butcher and buy or beg some scraps of meat. Then they would go into a garden and steal a turnip or a head of cabbage and some potatoes. They would then make a stew out of the meat and vegetables. They would have a big feed. That is what they called the shackle.

Things were very bad in Ireland and in England when I first went to England in the 1930s. When I first went over, I had no idea about the country at all. I had not a whole lot of money, and I was not long over when all the money that I had was gone. My first and hardest time was getting a job. I had served my time as a mason but I had not fully served it. So I was not able to do anything but navvying. One morning I awoke to find that my pockets were empty and I had to get out of where I was lodging.

I took off down by the Thames Embankment with the boys that evening. There were hundreds of people sleeping rough around the river. The weather was cold at that time and we used to collect waste paper out of the baskets and spread them under and over us to keep out the cold of the night. In the morning, we'd all come together, five, six, seven or eight of us and we would pool whatever money we had. We could buy a box of biscuits for six old pence, broken biscuits that could not be sold. We'd get a dixie of tea. I suppose there would be eight pints of tea in it for another sixpence, and if we could not get the bob between us, we would see who could go out and mooch the rest of it, beg it, or get it one way or another off somebody. When we started looking for a job, we were okay. On the building sites, they would be making tea and you'd always get a mug of tea from the boys.

We would sleep rough a lot. We slept everywhere. In doorways, back alleys, streets, railway stations, anywhere that you had a roof over your head. It would be cold but if you had a roof over you, you would get by for the night, and we, of course, were young and healthy at the time. We would jump a goods train and ride the rods to the next town. You often had to depend on what you got from the men on the building sites. If you were near a Catholic hostel or a Catholic church, you might get something from them to eat.

At that time when the jobs were scarce, we had to travel a lot. We were, in some

ways, like the travelling people. We would meet the travelling people on the road and they would tell us where the wells were. They might be after coming from another town or village, and they would tell us what was going on there. We always carried an old billycan for making a sup of tea, and we knew where the springs were and the fountains and the pumps.

Twelve months before the war broke out, the economy was booming. Wages were good. Food was cheap. Lodgings were £1 a week in London. We had a grapevine of our own. You could meet people on the road and they would tell you where the jobs were. But there were not too many English people on the road or sleeping rough.

There were great characters on the road, but we never knew the right name of any fellow. There was the Scum McCarthy from Waterford. The Muck Hogan came from Tipperary, the Tiger Lyons from Cork. They were all nicknames. You never gave details of where you came from. You never specified a town or a village. I was young at this time. There was a share of drinking. You would get a bottle of methylated spirits for five pence or six pence, uncoloured spirits. You could mix it with tea. You could walk miles of road with that in your belly. It would take the paint off a door. I remember one time when I was eight days on the road. I slept rough beside the old bicycle, on the side of the road every night. Also, I did a stint in the army. All the Flynns did stints in some army.

Some of the people of the villages and towns that we passed through were very charitable. More of them had no time for you. They thought you were a dosser, a scrounger who was not looking for work. But we, indeed, were certainly looking for work. That time of not having work did not last long. A time came twelve months before the war when things were booming. There was work everywhere. Wages were very good in comparison to the Irish wage, and food was very cheap. I got board and lodgings inside in London for £1 a week. The old pound was worth 240 pence.

There was a grapevine in respect to work. Men would have come from one town and they would be going to another town and if you were in conversation with them, they would tell you where the work was. It was bad in the thirties, after the coal miners strike. There was a lot of Welsh men and Irishmen on the road. But I never saw very many Englishmen on the roads.

I went to England for the second time during the Second World War, as it was called. I went to Huddersfield, lining furnaces with dolomite. I was maintaining the furnaces for a company named Hopkins. It was hard work, hot work. You could not wear shoes around these furnaces, you had to wear clogs. You would have to wear the clogs because of the heat from the furnaces. Leather shoes would not stand up to the great heat generated by these furnaces. You had to



Mountcollins townland on the first edition Ordnance Survey 6 inch map, 1840

wear a net over your hair because you were working with this black sand and it would cut the hair off your head. It was very hard and hot work. But the pay was good. When the war was over, I came home again and I took up my trade of stone-masonry that I had learned from my father.

But then I ran away a number of times from it. I wanted to go back to school and get an education. But I was the eldest of a large family and they could not afford to keep me at school. I had to go out and

earn money to feed the rest of the family. That is how things were in those distant days. But I had a chip on my shoulder for a while because I really felt that I was being victimised.

But then I saw how my father had to work for all of us, and after that I began to take pride in my work. I began to like what I was doing. I tried to be the best of masons and I thought I was a stone mason when I left my father and began to work on my own. But I was not as good as I thought. It was the road that taught me

my trade. I was a journeyman mason for years, and it was the old stonemasons on the road who taught me my trade and it was from them that I learned the fine art of stone.

There are a different type of people around Mountcollins now. They are more affluent, more independent. When I was growing up, very few would have a bicycle. Now they would not walk a mile or two without getting a lift in a motor car. Nobody had much in those times. But they were very good to each other and they shared. I would have one thing and they would share what they had with me; in regard to everything you owned, food, cigarettes, everything you owned. We all helped each other. Now they are too proud. They would be ashamed not to have it. They were a better people when they did not have a whole lot.

We had to make our own amusement. There was no radio at that time. I remember the first gramophone. I was always able to keep myself amused. We would meet in the evenings. I would be on the lookout for a musical instrument. If I got one, we would have a dance. We would dance a set or a waltz, or whatever took our fancy. If we did not have a musical instrument, we would dance, or diddle or whistle the dance music. We would stay in a house until about eleven o'clock, after that we might have been outstaying our welcome. Of course, there was no electricity in those times in the mountainy country that we lived in. Nor were there any roads. So we had to go home through the fields. That was no trouble for us at that time. We were well used to it. We would go through the fields and never lose our way at any time of the day or night. We had eyesight as good as the foxes. It was something we took for granted at that time.

House parties were a regular happening in our part of the country for many years. It was often a means of raising money for an individual, or a family, who were in straitened circumstances. There would be an entrance charge at the door. The raffle could be for any one of a number of things: a goose, a pig, a bonham, a donkey, an alarm clock. The older people would go up in the room to play the cards. These would usually be games of 41 or 45. The card players would often spend the night playing the games, late, late into the night. Finally one of them would win the prize, the bonham, the goose, the sum of money. If the prize was won by someone who did not want it, he would put it back in again and it would be played for at another raffle in the parish.

The young people, for the most part, would take no interest in the card playing. They would spend the night dancing in another room of the house. They would have come for the dancing. Local musicians would turn out for the night with their instruments: maybe an accordion, a fiddle, a humble mouth organ or just puss music, music made with the mouth,

or diddling. The dance could go on until two of the clock in the morning. The poor woman, and she usually was poor, who held the raffle would have a busy time the following day cleaning up the house. But we never thought of that. We were young and we could dance all night. There would be no great spread on such nights. We would drink the tea and eat the slices of bread which would sometimes be liberally covered with homemade jam. We would enjoy the night. The old people would enjoy the cards. In those years, there were not many nights of the week that you could not go to a house like that. Such nights were held all around the hill country. But when the dance halls were built, the house dances died out.

I remember the dances from these times. There was the eight hand reel, the twelve hand reel, the polka set and the *Girl I Left Behind Me*. We would dance old dances like *Hurry the Jug*. There were step dancers at these nights who could dance *The Blackthorn Stick*. We would dance *Hurry the Jug* and other old dances that are not even heard of these days. All our family were able to play musical instruments. But it was not everybody that had a musical instrument in those days. But I remember that I had an accordion when I was growing. It was only a ten key accordion, an old type of instrument. But I learned on that. Then the chromatic accordion came out. We quickly got used to them. Anywhere we heard a piece of music, we had a knack of picking it up. If we heard it played five or six times, we would be able to play it ourselves. There was no such thing as writing down music. Some of the musicians were able to read and write music, but we did not. My mother could play. But we had no tuition. The music came to us naturally. If we heard a tune a few times we learned it. Of course, we were listening to other players, players from Kerry and players from Cork. You could find any musical instrument in our house from a balalaika to an accordion. We would try to play any instrument that we could knock music out of from a tin whistle to a mouth organ. I often played for polka sets with the mouth organ. But the problem with the ear player was that if he heard it played wrong, he learned it wrong. That was how he then played the tune. It was only the good musician then who would show him how to play the tune correctly. But it was the hell of a job to get out of the way you were playing to the correct playing of the tune.

My mother would listen to us and if we were not playing it right, she would correct us. But outside of that, we had no tuition. But we listened to players from Cork, Kerry and Limerick and we formed a style of our own listening to these.

I never took part in the meitheal. But I would usually take part after the meitheal, that night when the dance took place. I was known to be a musician and, of course, I would be asked to play the night of the threshing. So I would be there to play after the gathering and after the

harvesting. I was then a journeyman mason and I was on the road all the time. I often met the west Kerry harvesters on the road. They used to follow the threshing from farm to farm.

I was once up at Ovens, near Cork city, and I was looking for a job. I think I got my training in England for keeping on the road, doing the journeyman. I kept on the road myself when I came home. The work was starting to get good in the towns and cities, but in the country places there was not much doing in my line of business, stone masonry. But I still went from town to town following the trade.

I went to Ovens once and I met there some of the west Kerry boys. I hadn't a bob in my pocket and I was feeling hungry. I saw this old bridge crossing a river and I said to myself that I would sit down for a while and rest in the shade of the bridge. I was cycling at the time and I rested the bicycle against the parapet of the bridge. My back was towards the river and resting against the battlement. Then I heard a splash. There were two fellows sitting on the bank of the river and one of them was washing his face. They were after shaving themselves in the reflection of the water in the river. No looking glass. Just looking into the water. I went to talk to the two boys and I told them my story. They told me who they were. They were following the thresher. One of them had a piece of meat, a piece of bacon, in a piece of cloth a little bigger than a handkerchief. They spread it out on the bank and offered it to me. I was ravenous and I ate it and I thought it was the best meal that I ever had. They had been given the food by the last farmer that they had worked for when they were leaving and they would be fed again by the next farmer who hired them. They were seasonal workers following the threshing machine and later the reaper and binder. They never stuck with the one farmer. They too were travelling men, men of the roads, following the seasonal work. They were like me, they enjoyed being on the road and meeting the people. They were very light-hearted men, a gay gang of men. The threshing would go on for three or four days. Then there would be a bit of drink and food and they would go on to the next farm.

The farmer and the travelling labourer had an understanding of each other. If the farmer liked one of these travelling workers he might ask him to stay for a couple of months. Some of them would, but many of them preferred the freedom of the open road. They would follow whatever they were working at, the threshing of the grain, for instance, but they would never like to bind themselves down to individual farmers. We always called them long distance boys. Men of the road was what they always were.

I had to spend five years with my father before I could go on the road as a qualified mason. When I left my father, I thought that I was fully qualified as a stonemason, but I was not. It was on the road that I learned the craft and the trade. It was on

the road that I met the different masons from Connacht and the north of Ireland, the Munster masons and the masons of Leinster. Not a lot of the Leinster masons were journeymen, as Dublin was a large city and the masons there rarely left it as they usually had enough work in the city to keep them working. I met a lot of masons from Clare and Tipperary and I worked with masons from Leitrim and Roscommon. But most of my work was in Limerick. I worked in Limerick for twenty years. I used to cycle from Mountcollins to Limerick city and cycle home again. I was a fit man in those days and cycling to and from the city was no great bother to me. I was fit. There was a comradeship between masons, a great loyalty. I remember if you went onto a job looking for work and the foreman could not job you, the masons would pass around a cap and collect five or ten shillings for you. That was a lot of money at that time. In those days, a pint of porter was only nine pence. Food was cheap. If you could collect nine or ten bob at the various sites, you would nearly have your wages. A mason was expected to help out his fellow mason if he was down on his luck. There was a masonic code of solidarity and unity amongst the masons.

I came home to Ireland shortly after the war was over and I went back to my craft of stonemasonry. I had learned the stone masonry from my father. I would have liked to have gone to school but, being the eldest of a large family, I had to go out to work to put bread on the table for the younger members of the family, of whom there was a large number. But at this time of my life I had come to have a pride in my work. I liked what I was doing. I wanted to be the best. When I left my father, I thought I was a qualified stonemason, but I was not. It was the road that made me a mason. I worked all over the country for years and it was this that made me a true mason. It was the old masons that I met that taught me about stone, and I came to see that I was only a rubble man when I was building with my father, because that was all the building that was in that area. It was only when I went working on schools, hospitals and churches that I had to do rock face.

There was a lot that I had to learn, but I got on well with the old masons. They could speak the bearlagar and they had a great *meas* on anyone who could speak even a little of it. It is a dead language and it was mostly the masons who spoke, or at least knew a few words and a few phrases, although I met a carpenter who said that he could say his prayers in it. *Arrig* is a mason. If we saw the ganger coming, we would shout aloud "*Showraig eisigh do luadar ar do rosa rua.*" This meant to look out for the boss was on the site. This would go along the line of workers and no man would raise his head. We had our own way of communicating in a bar. A mason might say "*eistigh do dhig dhil trua cinn thru thunn for a tish.*" This meant if the publican was alright for a few drinks on the slate. The young masons did not

bother speaking the bearlagar, but the old masons had no *meas* on you if you could not speak their language.

I worked mostly on limestone in Limerick, but in other parts of the country, I worked on quarry stone, brown stone, and green stone in Kerry. The green stone would be the hardest that you could find. You would need a blacksmith beside you to keep the tools edged. It was a wild stone and hard to dress. But there was a brown stone that was easily dressed, and the Leitrim stone was very nice to dress. You got different colours in it, brown, and various shades of red and green, and even yellow. There were a lot of quarries in the country that time, some great quarries. In later years, they thought this stone too dear and too slow to quarry. It was costing too much because wages had gone high. There was great pride amongst the masons in working these stones, but if they knew that the stones were going to be plastered, they were careless about the work because they knew that it was going to be covered over. But you pointed your work when you had jumper and jenkins and uncoarse rubble. But when you had broken ashlar, you never covered it. The mason guarded his reputation. He did not, under any circumstances, want to have a name of doing bad work. It was either a good or a bad job, and he did not want to be looking at his own bad work and, worse still, having others looking at it and criticising it for years to come.

The great masons of my time were the Dohertys of Clare, the Malones and the Kemmys of Limerick, Aidan Halloran of Limerick and the Flynns of Limerick. All these masons took great pride in their work. I worked for some time or other in all the counties in the south of Ireland.

A lot of travelling people came around our part of the country. Many of these were good tinsmiths. The Mc Donaghs of Galway used to come to Mountcollins creamery. They were tinsmiths. They used to get a lot of work around Mountcollins. They would often spend three or four weeks there. They would be repairing milk tankers for the creamery. They were noted tinsmiths. They got a lot of work there and they were much respected. They also made covers for the milk tanks for the farmers, and the farmers would get them to make tin gallons to hold water and milk. The local people would also bring in buckets and tanks to have these repaired and riveted.

Some of them, the O'Briens, used to carry the budget on their back. They would be going from town to town, fixing umbrellas, and repairing tin kettles and buckets. They were good tradesmen and they had all the proper tools. The local communities accepted them better than they do now because they were very useful to them. It was the plastic that put these itinerant tinsmiths out of business.

But they continued on the road. The women sold out of osier baskets. They offered combs, clothes brushes, clothes pegs, safety pins, holy pictures et cetera. I

remember this old lady coming in when I was working for Jack Cotter in Brosna. God knows what she had in the basket, but she emptied her basket out on the table. Jack was not greatly pleased with her arriving at this time, and he said: "Gather up your old trumperies, girl. Its nearly dinner time and can't you see that we have men working today." But she did not take any notice of him and she continued to show her wares to the woman of the house. The women of the house probably bought something from her, as the people were very good to the travelling people in those times. They would give them half a cake of bread, or money, or tea, or a few cups of sugar. It was thought to be bad luck to turn the travelling people away from the door.

The travellers always made their tea on the side of the road. When I was on the road myself, I often had tea with them. They would always be on the move, going from town to village, selling their skills and their wares. If they had a piece of bacon, they would boil this in a pot on the side of the road. Some of the women were great. They used to make fine bread, grand soda cakes. I often enjoyed a feed with them. They were the best of company. They are more independent now. It is the money again. When the fairs and markets were taken out of the towns of Ireland, the whole way of living changed. They did away with the creameries, the horse fairs, the markets, the calf markets and the cattle fairs. You see, you had all the travelling people coming into those and the country people. They mixed better with each other and they knew one another better and they trusted each other more. I think there was more integration than there is now. It was a better thing really. Often, there was not a big gulf when it came to financial situations. The ordinary people lent a helping hand to the travellers more than they do today. The people today will say: "Yerra, they're better off than we are ourselves." They have no pity for them like the pity that we had when we were mixing with them and friendly with them on a man-to-man basis.

In the 1930s and 1940s, and indeed the previous decades, the priests had considerable power over the people. There were always people who opposed them. In those times, many of the priests were against the dance halls and they were even against the local house dances. They preached sermons from the altars against company keeping. It must have been difficult for the opposite sexes to ever come together and get to know each other and to marry and to procreate. The priests preached sermons from the altars against company keeping and they would say in the course of these sermons that the devil was in the dance hall. However, some years later, and not that many years later, priests were to be found running dance halls to make money for their churches, at least that was what they told us.

But there was a priest in Mountcollins

and he was always preaching against the dance hall, saying that the devil was in the hall. The hall in Mountcollins was owned and run by an old man named Paddy the Twin, God have mercy on poor Paddy's soul. We had this priest at this time and he hated dance halls and all that he imagined took place in them. He claimed that the devil was inside in every dance hall in Ireland. One Sunday he gave an awful, frightening sermon on the dance hall in Mountcollins. After this thundering sermon, he went back to the hall after mass and went into Paddy's wife. He gave out to her in the strongest and most angry fashion. But she, God be good to her, shut the door on him. We came along later and we asked her what he had said. But she said that he was only looking for Paddy to build a little wall. We saw the priest coming again and we ran into the forge because we were afraid of him. Danny Horgan was in the forge. He had not been at mass and he did not know anything that had happened. The priest, still fuming, said to Danny: "Do you see that place. The devil is in it." Danny had this catch phrase that he often used and he came out with it: "Wisha, you don't tell me so." This, of course, further enflamed the priest who shouted: "Well whether you believe it or not, he is there."

Of course, it was regarded by more or less everyone that it was a terrible thing to have a child outside of marriage. If a girl had a baby out of wedlock, she frequently had to leave her native place and go to England or some distant place to have her baby, that is if she did not put the child up for adoption. Sometimes the man stood by the girl and he married her. If that took place, it was seen as being reasonably okay. But often the man would not stand by the girl and she was left to paddle her own canoe. The priests had a lot to answer for in making it seem so wicked.

Sometimes a shotgun marriage was arranged. This often occurred when the parents of the young woman brought pressure on the young man to marry her. But it was generally thought that these were not very happy marriages, where the man was being forced into a marriage against his will. Sometimes too, threats were made to force the man to marry her, or to suffer at the hands of her relatives. There were matches made in that way but they could not be regarded as very happy marriages.

It was customary for the father to choose a wife for his sons. Sometimes he was helped by the local matchmaker. Some of these turned out to be very successful marriages, even though the couple might only meet once or twice before the marriage. A bride would have to have a fortune to marry into a farm. This fortune would then subsequently be handed to an unmarried sister of the groom. Sometimes a lump of money like that would do a whole round of the parish and be handed on from one farm to another.

The matchmaker always had an eye

open for what he saw as suitable partners. He might see a young man at mass. He might see a young woman in the fields or at the shop in the village, and he might see that they were suitable to each other and he would approach the respective fathers to hear what they would think and say to the proposed union. Her people would come to walk the land and to see what kind of a living she would have. Neither the young man nor the young woman would have any say. These matches were carried out all over the country. There were love matches too, but some of the made matches were happier.

There were bailiffs along the Feale, on the lookout for poachers and foul fishing, but they could not be everywhere along the bank, and you would generally have an idea where they were. There would be a grapevine amongst the fishermen. One fellow would know where the bailiff was, or there would be a known poacher on the bank and he would be acting as a decoy so that the bailiff would follow him, believing that he was fishing illegally and that he would have a case against him. But the actual poachers would be at some other pool on the river where they were safe from the eyes of the bailiff and free to snatch the salmon. We had tricks like that and we used help each other like that.

Poaching at night was for the winter salmon, but I never did a whole pile of that. I never did give in to that. The fish were coming up to spawn at that time in the winter and you were destroying too many of fish when you killed one of those. By killing off those spawning fish, you were cutting off your nose to spoil your face. They reckon that a fourteen pound salmon could produce up to ten tons of fish, if they all matured. But a lot of the fish used to die and the eggs would get washed away with the floods. A lot of them too would die when they were small, after being washed out.

At night you would know where the salmon was because he made a scour to bed in the river. They would make a trough first and then the hen salmon would lay her eggs in the trough in the bed of the river, in sand or in gravel. The hen would lay the eggs in the gravel. The cock would be on top and he would put on the smelt or whatever they called it. And they would come on either side of the furrow and they would heap the sand on both sides of it and on top of it. That is what they called the "scour." The eggs would hatch out underneath the sand and gravel if the floods did not come too heavy. That was the natural course of birth. If you had a salmon hatchery, it was done in a different way. You would fish up that river before March 1 and you would be much surprised if you did not meet some fish in early March. They spawn later now than they used to at that time. That time they would all be gone back by Christmas. Most of them would have scoured and spawned by then. Now they have a later run. I do not know why. Was it that they were being put into the river at a

later stage? They do not come now until after Christmas, and they do not run early anymore in the manner that the old salmon did.

The Irish language was spoken in my grandmother's time. I remember her speaking it when I was small. My grandmother and the older people, if they did not want us to know what was going on, spoke in Irish, but at that time they mostly spoke English. But the remnants of the Irish language were all around us at that time. When I first went to school, we were taught a good deal of Irish, but later I went to Meinkilla national school. The teachers in that school were older and they did not know much Irish and they did not go to take the courses in the Irish language.

I often listened to Miko Russell on the radio, and Miko reminds me of the old people around Mountcollins. They sang songs. They were bilingual. They sang one verse in Irish and the next verse in English. You would never hear that now. It is a pity that they were not recorded, but we had nothing to record them with in those days. It was a great pity that they were not recorded in writing or in some way. These were fine old songs. The ramblers to the house would be sitting at a big open hearth, around a big open fire and those of us that could sing, would sing. If one could not sing, he would recite some verses. We had to make our own amusements. We were happy. If we were not dancing, we were singing or playing. There were no pressures on us in those times.

In those days, the river Feale was one of the best fishing rivers in Ireland. It was a grand, clean river. You could drink the water out of it at any time of the year and it was crystal clear. It was a great river for the spring salmon. There would be a great run of them. And the pale would come with the white trout in June. There was always a good supply of fish. The sea trout come up there still but not in the same number. The salmon are very scarce in the river today, but I remember a time when I could make three months wages in one morning, and wages were not that low in that time. And I often did that with the salmon when I wanted to put a good lot of money together. Of course, this was not always fair fishing. You would fish fair when the water was high, when the fish would be inclined to take. There were days when you would kill from three to six salmon in a day's fishing. When the river got low, we knew every rock. We knew where every salmon would lie. We could hit him, foul hook him and play him out. This would be with a "strocail," a three-pronged hook or with an ordinary fly. We often just did it with an ordinary fly and it was very seldom that we would use a gaff. We would have a bit of rotten thread and we would tie it around the lead and we would tie the lead onto the shank of the hook and sink it down. And the feather of the fly was like the flight of a dart. It would guide the point of the hook into the fish as straight as an arrow. The feather would

bring the hook around and once you pulled towards the head and got under the scales, you got a stitch in him. And then he played around the pool as if you had him by the mouth. It was harder to bring him out because he had the use of his head and his tail and it took you longer to bring him out.

But there would not be a mark on him. You would play him out just as if you caught him fair. This, of course, was most important if you were going to sell him on, as the water keepers and the buyers would examine the fish for signs of foul play and not only would they not buy him but you could find yourself in the court for poaching and illegal fishing. But you would play him out just as if you had caught him fair. You would take him out by the tail and bring him out on the bank, without any nets, only the rod and line. You could have a fairly decent living off the river.

When I was growing up, there was great shooting on Dave Lenihan's mountain in Caherlevoy, a place high and remote. The shooting was good too out towards Ballycommene and that wild part of the country. There would be a lot of grouse and a fair share of pheasants. At that time, the country around here was full of plover and snipe. It was illegal to catch them but, in fact, they used to often net the plover. They used Indian hemp to do this. It was as strong as picture cord, it was light and strong.

They used to mount the nets in the fields, and they had a way of setting a net in a field where the grey plover and the green plover were accustomed to land. They would set their nets in these known landing places. They had decoy plover calls and they would blow into these whistles and the sound would attract the plover because the whistle imitated the call of the plover. They would place a decoy plover in the middle of the field and when the real plovers circled over the field, they would hear the false call which they mistook for a true call. They would circle and circle and then they would land in the field. As soon as they landed on the heather, the man who was netting the birds pulled the stick. It was called the kingpin and it flew with such force that if it hit you in the leg, it would break your leg. They had a way of setting the nets with sticks and sallies, strong sallies with a spring in them. The general effect was that the whole net would come down on all the plover that was on the field.

They would eat some of them and they would have a market for the rest. They would send them to London or to the Dublin market. When I was growing up, there was great take for pheasant and plover and snipe. The snipe was worth about four old pence each and twelve pence made a shilling. Then there were the ordinary traps that they used to use to catch game birds. They also shot the pheasant, the grouse, and the snipe. They were several ways of catching and killing the wild game birds.