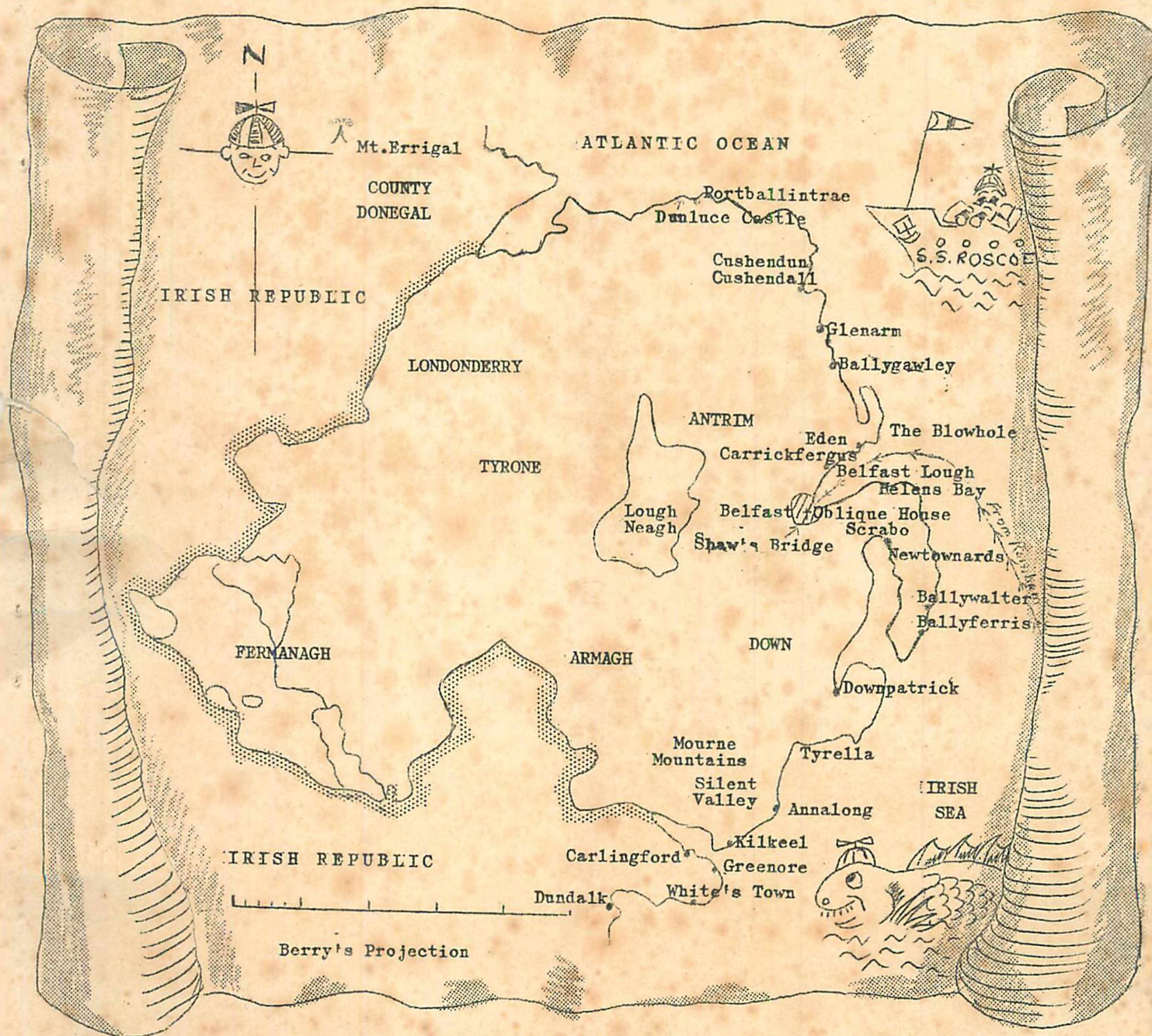


THROUGH DARKEST IRELAND

WITH KNIFE FORK & SPOON



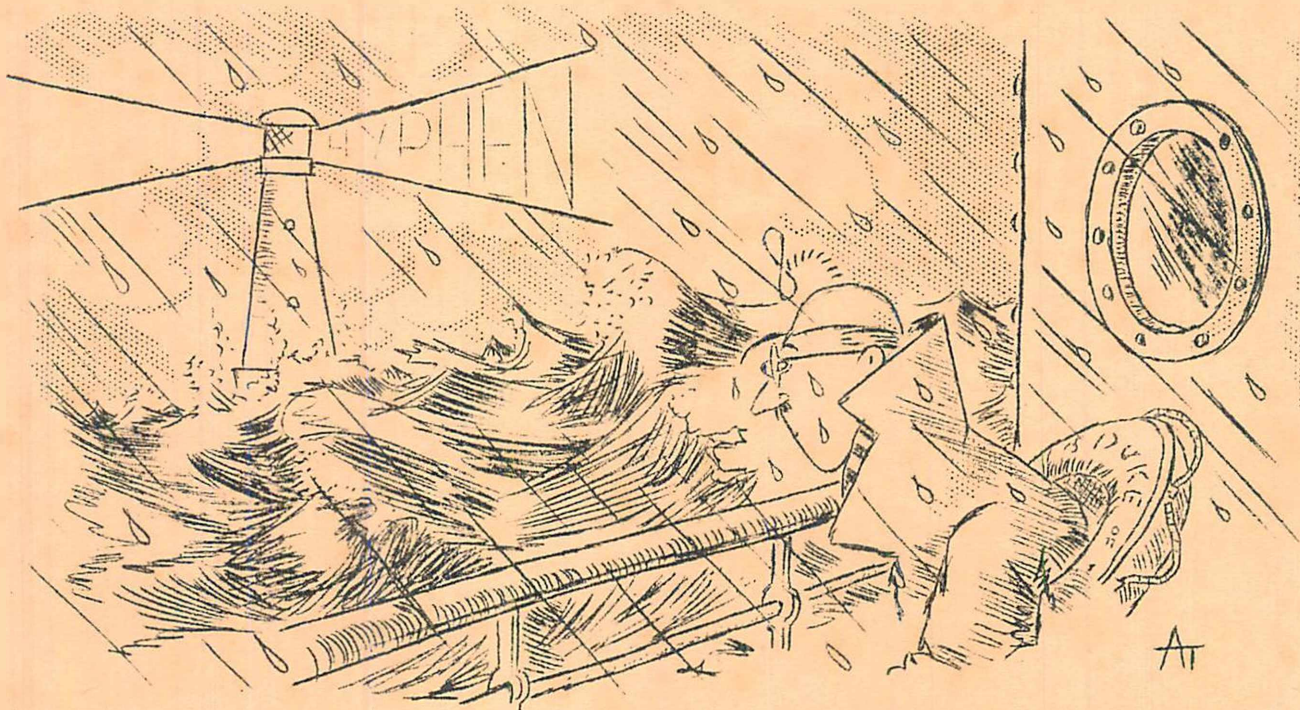
18,000 words on a one-string harp
by
Chuck Harris

Written and produced for FAPA, OMPA,
and my own amusement.

This is a long and rambling account
of two weeks that I spent in Ireland
last summer. It seems to be mostly
about what I had to eat, --- hence
the title.

But, there are other fingers in the
pie as well as the one with the dark
crescent under the nail that belongs
to me. John Berry did the cover;
Bob Shaw did the ghoddminton illo on
page 14. Arthur Thomson, the hand
over my fist, did the other illo's
and helped out in a million other
ways. If it hadn't been for the
help and encouragement I got from
these people I doubt if I would
ever have finished the thing.
It starts on the next page.

The duplicator is a Gestetner and
is situated at "Carolin" Lake Ave
Rainham, Essex, England.



The "Duke of Rothesay" sailed from Heysham on the midnight tide. Her precious cargo was me. I'd been warned that even with good weather conditions the crossing to Ireland was pretty bad, but I'd thought my informants were just cissies. Believe me, they weren't. The boat was jammed tight with people and I'd considered myself lucky to have found a canvas chair to sit in and a little corner in the hold where I was out of the wind. In place of the hatches there was a sailcloth awning; below it us passengers were crammed shoulder to shoulder in a sort of open-air sardine tin.

Before we sailed there was a bar open and doing a brisk business, but it closed as soon as the ship cast off. The bar-tender probably got cut and swam along with the rest of the crew, -- we didn't see any of them again until the boat docked eight hours later in Belfast.

As soon as we got outside Heysham harbour the boat began to rock a bit. It was by no means a dark and stormy night, but it was more than sufficient for the people who had been stocking up at the bar. As if by prearranged signal, half of the passengers began to throw up. I'd been more interested in hanging onto my chair and my corner than in fighting my way to the bar for a drink and I wasn't sick myself. I just sat there, tried to ignore what was going on, and read my Ogden Nash book. (I'm sorry it wasn't *GALAXY*, -- the only excuse I can offer is that I'd never intended to write this report.)

After the bad sailors had given us their all, Ghod took a hand. It began to rain. This was no gentle shower pit-patting on the surface of the sea, --this was the sort of stuff Maugham based "Rain" upon. It was bitterly cold, the rain poured in through and around the awning and I began to feel like a character in a Hitchcock film, -- the one who dies ignobly and messily just before the end. I looked around for a drier spot and was fortunate in being able to edge my way underneath the edge of the hatch. There were three kids travelling with

their mother and father and they squeezed together to make room for me. The eldest boy, a wee kid of about ten, was crying with the cold, but his parents had their hands full trying to keep his two brothers warm. I felt sorry for him, -- I was damn near crying myself, -- so I shared the rest of my thermos flask with him, and then had him on my lap, under my raincoat for the rest of the night. We kept each other warm and he slept until we steamed up Belfast Lough and tied up at Donegall Quay.

After we'd docked, as I was going up the companion-way to get out of the hellhold, I found a brass plaque on the wall. It certified this poop-deck as being "811 ft. square and accomodation for 90 third-class passengers when not occupied by cattle." Irish Fandom thought this was pretty funny when I told them about it.

Walt was waiting for me at the bottom of the gang-plank. I hadn't been able to tell him what time the boat would dock and he'd been up meeting all the boats since 6.30. a.m. We were very pleased to see each other. The Morris, -- the one Bea Mahaffey rode in that has space for a kettle under the bonnet, -- was parked around the corner, and in a couple of minutes we were on our way to Oblique House. The whole of the town was decorated with flags and bunting, and there were triumphal arches spanning the road. Walt spent most of the journey trying to convince me that it was a spontaneous demonstration by readers of the Vargo Statten Magazine. I didn't really believe him.

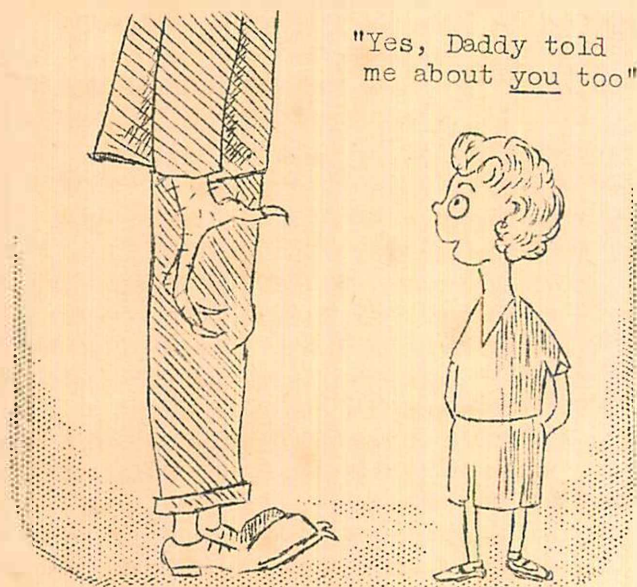
170 Upper Newtownards Road is a large terrace house built about 50 years ago. I recognised it right away because it had 170 above the door and Madeleine on the doorstep. She'd been up since 6.30. too and had enormous quantities of tea, eggs, bacon, toast, and mail waiting for us, -- along with James White who had travelled right across Belfast so that he could greet me with "Hiya Claude!" when I arrived.

We did more talking than eating, --although not much more, but Walt and James both had to go to work and I thought I'd better get some sleep in. I'd been up since 6 a.m. the previous morning and I felt pretty tired. They took me up to my room and promised to waken me at lunch time. I undressed and went to bed.

I stayed there for almost ten minutes. The bed was comfortable enough and Madeleine had slipped an electric blanket in to warm it for me, but I was excited and it seemed such an anti-climax to arrive in Belfast and then go straight to bed. So, I got out, got dressed and began a tour of inspection.

This was Carol's room, --Carol is seven, -- and on the Mickey Mouse black-board there was written permission for me to play with her toys. These had been placed in one corner of the room and carefully labelled as a sort of fannish museum. I thought it was worth the whole trip just to see the genuine original bucket that had been kicked so recently by the late Mr Ziff, and a heap of similar fan rarities.

Downstairs I found Madeleine and Carol. I hadn't met Carol before, but we'd heard of each other and we got along fine. We went off upstairs again to play bricks, but by the time we'd inspected the dolls and glanced at the



comics, (Carol is also a POGO fan), Walt was home and lunch was ready. Along with dessert I gave him a note written by Carol. It said: CHUCK HARRIS IS No.1 FAN. (Signed) CAROL WILLIS. A perceptive kid is young Carol.

Bob Shaw had gotten himself married a week or so before I arrived. He'd gone down to Eire for the honeymoon, but had sent us a postcard to say that he'd be home that evening if he didn't get lost again. ("We got lost and had to ask the way to Bray three times, -- and nobody said 'With your head back '"") We went down the station to meet the Happy Couple, but we missed them and met James and Peggy Martin instead. Peggy is a pretty wench -- most Irish women seem to be above average in looks (and brother! those Connemara redheads!) -- but she is far too nice to be a figment of my imagination as somebody once suggested in "Hyphen." I'd been writing to her for some time and, naturally, I was hoping that we would be able to spend some time together talking to each other and perhaps exchanging compliments on our tastes in Valentine cards. Somehow, James couldn't understand this though. He has a nasty suspicious mind, -- and a big investment in the rock Peggy wears on her third finger.

We stayed at the station for an hour or so until James, diligently searching for Bob, peered into a taxi and frightened two inoffensive nuns out of their wits. We decided it was time to go home.

When we got there, Bob was waiting for us on the doorstep. He'd come back by an earlier train and had been standing there for three-quarters of an hour. He'd left a message for us, -- he hadn't a pencil so he'd pricked it out with a pin, -- on the back of an old envelope, and was on the point of leaving when we arrived.

I was glad we caught him, -- he had Sadie with him (and I'm glad she caught him too). I'd been anxious to meet her ever since Bob showed me a picture of her two years ago at the White Horse, and she'd heard about me too. (Gad, I'm famous in Ireland.) We sat around and talked about the wedding and looked at the photographs, but it was getting late and they had to get home.

It was quite dark by this time, but at almost every street corner enormous bonfires were being lit as part of "The Glorious 12th" celebrations. This, it turned out, was also the real reason for the flag-bedecked streets. It was something entirely new to me, -- I'd never seen anything like it before in all my life. In England, the only time I can remember bonfires in the streets was on VE night, but that was just small stuff, nothing comparable with this. Here there were crowds of people dragging up fuel, the flames were right up to the housetops, -- Walt tells me that sometimes the flames are the housetops, -- and everybody was singing loyalist songs and generally having themselves a time.

The 12th., The Glorious 12th, is the big day of the year for the Protestants in Northern Ireland, and the celebrations begin a couple of days beforehand. It commemorates one of the victories of William, Prince of Orange, against the Catholic forces of the South. Although this happened way back in the 17th Century, they still celebrate it as if it were only yesterday.

Religious feeling runs very high in Ireland, and in the North, the Orangemen, --the Protestants -- outnumber the Catholics two to one. They are mainly of Scots Calvinist descent, and although they do not love the English, they dislike Catholicism even more. They prefer to stay as part of Great Britain rather than leave us and join the South to form a United Ireland. They take the British Royal Family and the Union Jack as totems, and even go to such lengths as having their houses built with a special socket in the wall for the flagpole they bring out for "the 12th." I was quite astonished to see "God Save The Queen" white-washed onto blank walls in the same way as London's East End Fascists daub up "Kill the Jews." Truly, the whole business was incredible, -- it takes an awful

lot of fervour as well as timber to build these triumphal arches across the streets and cover them with slogans like "Protestantism is our religion, --- tolerance is our faith," "Civil and Religious Liberty" "Remember 1690" (!) and the ever-present "No Surrender."

But, I know little of Irish politics, I have friends on both sides, and I wouldn't like to say which is right and which is wrong.

On the Sunday we had planned to spend the day at Portrush, -- a coast resort. Walt had booked a train compartment in the name of "The Oblique Angles" and we were going to start an annual excursion. However, there was a poor weather forecast on the television, (there was always a poor weather forecast on the TV, --Walt was so dissatisfied that he was talking of buying a new set with guaranteed weather forecasts), so we decided to stay home. We had already arranged to meet George Charters at the station, so as soon as we'd had breakfast, Walt and I went off to collect him and bring him home.

Somehow or other, I am always disappointed when I meet George. He doesn't look like Somebody Who Has Appeared In Hard Covers, and he doesn't say "Howdy pardners!" in the way you would expect from a real fanatical Max Brand addict. Still, he tried hard, -- he wore his two-tone cowboy shirt, and managed to mention Frederick Faust within five minutes of meeting me.

On the bus home from the station, I'd given the conductor a half-crown for the fares, and amongst the change he gave me two foreign coins. I thought he'd mistaken my accent and believed me to be a tourist from Wiltshire instead of from Essex. It wasn't until later that somebody told me that both English and Eire currency were valid in Northern Ireland, and were always used interchangeably. I was very happy to hear it.

The television had promised us cloud, rain, and an unsettled further outlook. I guess that the set may have been at fault after all, because the sun came out and it was one of the best days we had. We took rugs out onto the lawn in front of the house, sprawled in the sun, and talked. This, on a Sunday in Belfast, is Unconventional. James and Peggy arrived, then Bob and Sadie and the affair developed into a Sprawling Championship that was judged by the Respectable People who peered over the hedge at us on their way home from church. It was a wonderful day. I admit that we did mention science-fiction once or twice, and we spent a couple of hours talking about Hyphen, but nobody suggested that we got up and Did Something.

Except Madeleine.

Sometimes I think that the girl doesn't realise than even Jophan must have spent some time in the glades of gafia. Here we were, all busily improving our suntans and doing tricks with matches

when she came out to ask us what we would like for supper. This was a good subject for a discussion. I like chips, (if Lee Hoffman can get away with cold mashed potato sandwiches, I don't see why I shouldn't have a fetish for chips), and eventually everyone else thought they would like chips too.

"Shurely," she said, -- and then quite calmly detailed us as a working party to go to her father's allotment and dig the potatoes to make the chips. Those "Galway Bay" Micks are just a myth, -- if you want taties for dinner, then brother, you dig 'em.



The allotment is just around the corner. We took the biggest baskets we could find and all went together. Walt, Bob, and George had difficulty in keeping up with the rest of us, so that by the time we arrived there was only James and myself available to dig the damn things. James convinced me that he'd never seen a garden fork before in his life and it finished with me digging whilst he picked up the potatoes as I unearthed them. At first there didn't seem to be any, -- we'd been digging up the late potatoes instead of the early ones, -- but eventually we found the right section and dug enough potatoes to last them until they get another tourist who decides that he might like chips for supper. After that we replanted the late potato plants whilst the girls went off to look for strawberries. It was a fairly fruitless quest. Walt, Bob, and George arrived in time to help us put the tools away, and we locked the gate and fled as quietly as a herd of locusts.

Mealtimes with the Heels of IF is another of those Experiences. Madeleine is a beautiful cook with a flair for extraordinarily good cakes. That night, apart from the chips and other stuff, there was gingerbread, chocolate sponge, cream sponge, cherry cake, flan, macaroons and pancakes as well as oddments such as biscuits that I never got around too. James is on a diet and has some sort of wholemeal biscuits that everyone else helps him to eat. He's liable to make disparaging remarks about food and scathingly refer to it as "just fuel" -- but, as Walt pointed out: "All the resources of modern science are devoted to keeping James alive, ---- hardly seems worthwhile, does it?" With the rest of us, food occupies the same status as beer does in other fan groups. The others fall on the grub like ravenous beasts, and if you're too timid to take more than two pieces of each separate cake, they stop for an instant to inquire politely about the state of your health. The conversation is as good as the food and the whole thing is rather like living in a world straight out of one of Walt's Xmas cards... It's impossible to give any real idea of what goes on, but here is a short (the whole thing is just a two minute section of an hour-long affair), verbatim sample. For once, they've been talking about science-fiction, and are now discussing "Hero's Walk." Walt mentions that it reads as if it were written with a ball-point pen, -- all balls and no point, and Madeleine hastily asks George what he thought about it.

George: "Crud. The only action that takes place is when you close the book after you've finished."

Peggy: "Well! It was much better than John Carter of Barsoom. I don't like bloodthirsty villains -----except Chuck."

James: "He's sampled me. He knows good blood when he sees it."

Peggy: "You've got blood?"

James: "Bite me and see."

Peggy: (ultra-piously) "It's Friday!"

While this is going on, Bob and I are quietly working our way through the cakes. Bob shares my passion for gingerbread and Walt is teasing him by moving the plate out of reach. He has already eaten eight pieces running, -- two more than I have, -- and Walt has accused him of having a fifth dimensional gut. Madeleine has joined in and is offering us little pancakes instead of the gingerbread.

Bob: "No thanks. You gave us those wee things to put our cups on before.... but I'll have some of that fake flan."

Walt: "Your favourite dish....food."

Bob:(Indignantly) "I'm not really greedy, I only do this for fun. Think of the material Chuck's getting for his next column. (He holds out his cup for some

more tea.) I'm not hungry -- I only eat the stuff because I don't want to offend Madeleine." (Aside) "Note the steady hand with which she fills the saucer full of tea."

Sadie: (apologetically) "He's off his food today."

George, Peggy, James, & Madeleine: "He's on Walter's!"

Walt: (in a supremely sarcastic tone as he offers the plate) "Have you tried the gingerbread?"

Bob: (stretching out both hands for it)-- "Yes, and found it not guilty."

This is a fair sample of the chitchat and it goes on until the last biscuit has been fought over, --- and then they start to squabble about who will do the dishes. George is usually the first to leave because he has to catch a train back to Bangor, and he invariably manages to miss the washing-up. Madeleine and Peggy have told him that they saved him some dishes from last night, but he is happily ignoring them. Peggy is determined that he shall do them and decides to appeal to his chivalry.....

Peggy: (piteously) "Dishes are a man's job. George, you wouldn't stand by and see us soil our lily-white hands, would you?"

George: (horrified) "Ghod, no!..... I shall be upstairs playing ghoddminton with the others."

Madeleine: "Very well, Chuck and Peggy can do the dishes. You two can be alone out there."

James: (Shocked to the core) "Him, alone with my dish?"

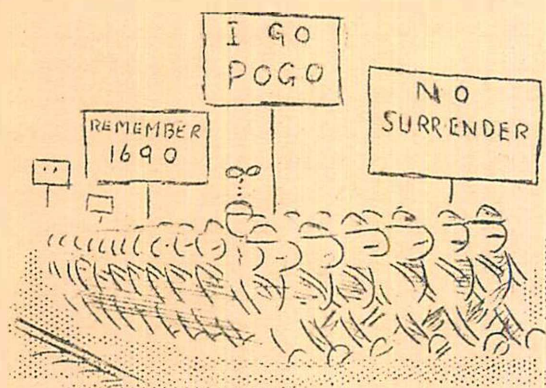
Bob: (who won the last biscuit) "Huh. Chuck is an expert at slavering over Hot Dishes."

In the end, all the men did the dishes. I bet I'm the first Belfast pilgrim to return home with dishpan hands...

The next day was the genuine, original Glorious Twelfth and everybody, -- both Catholic and Protestant alike, -- get two days off from work to celebrate. The Big Event of the holiday is the mass parade of the various Protestant Societies, ---the Loyal Orange Lodges, Total Abstinence Groups, Total Drunkenness Groups, etc. Walt and I got up early and went downtown to watch it. We arrived after it had started, and when we left, an hour and a half later, they were still marching.

Contingents come from all over Northern Ireland, and there were one or two groups from Eire too. There were no women or children in the procession, -- partly because this is a male demonstration, and partly because there has been trouble in previous years as they marched through Catholic districts.

The men were dressed in their best suits and bowler hats and wore an impressive purple and orange sash across their shoulders. They were formed up into detachments, each with its own band and its own banner depicting "William, Prince of Orange, of Glorious, Pious, and Immortal Memory," and they marched ten abreast to the old traditional Loyalist songs like "The Protestant Boys" and "The Sash me Father Wore." I don't go for this sort of guff usually but I was rather impressed. There was no carnival air present, and I couldn't help but admire some of the old gaffers with a full set of Great War medals who pulled their shoulders back and marched in line and in step with their grandsons. They were a very determined-looking bunch. Grim.



Apart from the length of the procession, I think the most noteworthy thing was the number of bands. There were pipe bands, -- with Irish pipers in their saffron kilts and Highlanders in tartans, there were accordion bands, drum and fife bands, mixed bands, concertina bands (!), bugle bands, and just about everything that is portable and can produce music except gramophones.

Their theme song is "The Sash Me Father Wore." I copied the words from a little book I found in Walt's room:--

"It's old but it's beautiful, it's the best you ever seen
Been worn for more than ninety years in that little Isle of Green
From my Orange and Purple Forefather it descended with galore
It's a terror to them paypish boys, the sash me father wore..."

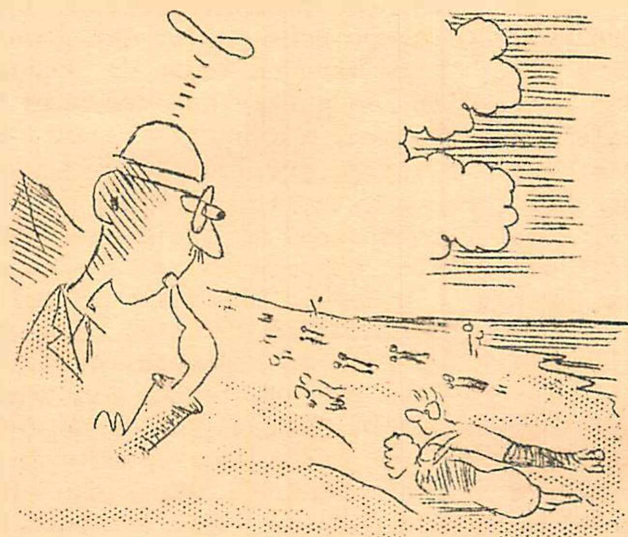
Actually, "them paypish boys" are unlikely to see it. The only people on the streets of Belfast are Protestants wearing an Ulster Lily in their buttonhole, and the Catholics (or many of them) spend the holiday on a cruise to the Isle of Man. But it's a fine parade and afterwards, the taverns -- and there are plenty of them -- have a field day.

The Oblique Angles didn't join it though. After we'd been home and had lunch we all went off on a substitute excursion to Helen's Bay, -- a little place on the shore of Belfast Lough. We packed sandwiches and carried thermos flasks of tea for a picnic.

Walt marshalled us down to the railway station, got us into the carriage and counted us three times to make certain that we were all there. The train was packed tight and I'd been warned to stay close to Bob and not get lost. When we got out at Helen's Bay, we held another census on the platform and discovered that George was missing. Panic! We scurried frantically along the platform looking into the windows of the departing train and bleating "George, ghodamn you, George." GATWC is notoriously absent-minded and we thought he'd been in his usual state of somnolence and had travelled onto Bangor out of habit. Our day was spoilt and we were holding the wake on the platform when George calmly walked out of the "Gentlemen's". We damn near lynched him on the signal post.

We came out of the station and began to walk down to the beach. After five minutes or so, through a gap in the houses, we had our first glimpse of the sea. Bob perked up immediately. "Doesn't the sea air make you feel hungry?" he announced casually. James, the only person we could trust to carry the ffood, quietly ignored him and couldn't even be tempted to offer a biscuit for the tapeworm.

Helen's Bay is a very quiet place and a great favourite with courting couples. Here was raw, searing passion and I was shocked. I tried looking the other way, but it was just as bad in all directions. I mentioned that I hadn't expected a race of saints and scholars to behave in such a fashion, but Walt was good enough to explain that these were not Irish people but just London excursionists. I suppose I should have guessed that.



We were in a hurry to eat, -- apart from Bob, -- and just ambled along the shore towards the village of Carnalea. (Yes, I know it's an apt name.) After a couple of miles the excursionists became scarcer, and we came upon a small deserted cove and, more important, an empty tin can on the sand. We propped the can on a rock and for half an hour, instead of acting like the intelligentsia of international fandom, we behaved like people -- and spent the time throwing pebbles at it. I began to doubt if we were really star-begotten after all.

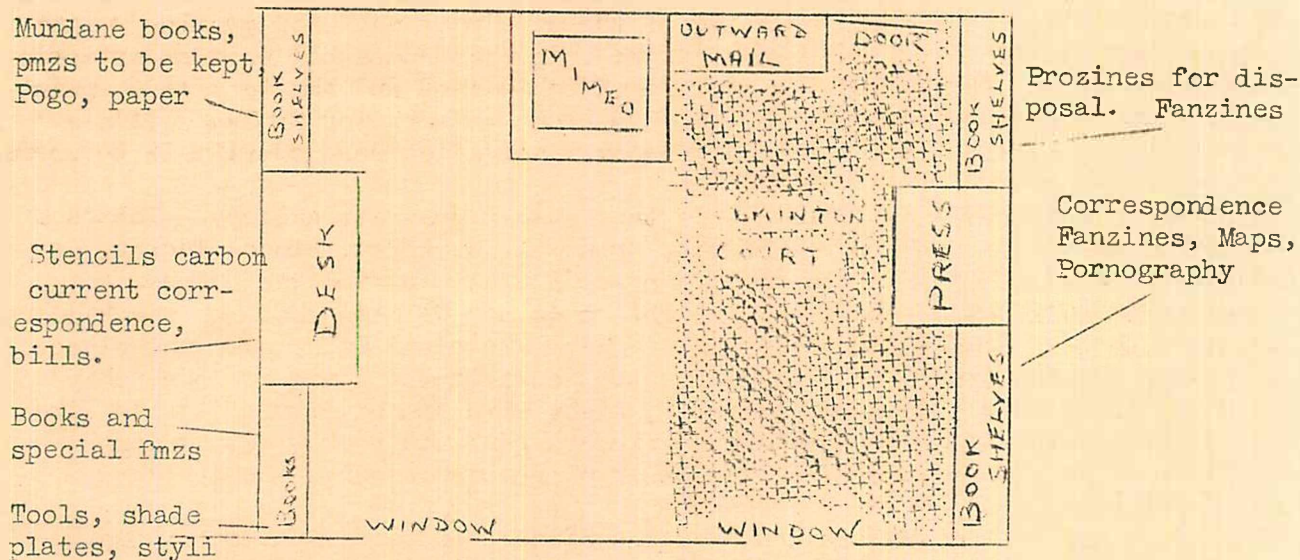
After all this exercise, Bob was almost collapsing from hunger, so we began to look for a picnic spot. We were all pretty ravenous. Even James thought that "the mantle of Bob Shaw had fallen on our stomachs." We sat down and for the first and last time I can remember, the table talk -- except that we didn't have a table -- consisted of "Yes, please," or "Are there anymore eggs left, and if not, kindly pass the cake."

After we'd finished eating and had burnt the debris, it was time to start our way back home. Helen's Bay was miles behind us so we came up over the cliffs to another station. It was fortunate that the rest of them were familiar with the district because I would never have found the station by myself. Neither Station Avenue or Station Road had anything to do with the railway at all. The only route lay along a little cart-track called Station Approach. It was an insight on the Irish Way of Life that the others should seem startled at me finding something peculiar about the arrangement.

On the Tuesday I began to explore The Attic. This room is the nucleus of Oblique House, and is something like the dear old Epicentre, -- except that it's a lot tidier. That doesn't seem a very helpful explanation though, -- maybe a plan would be better. It looks something like this.....

Visitors Guide to the Shrine

(Neofen remove shoes on entering, but this is the sole restriction)



((This is a rough copy of a plan that had been prepared and pinned to the wall for my special guidance. Intending pilgrims should cut it out and keep it in a place of safety, -- it represents my first and last intrusion into the Art Dept.))

But, a couple of lines with "Bookshelves" written between them doesn't seem to convey very much about what the shelves actually look like. Almost everywhere in the room where it's possible to get a shelf, he's fixed one in, and every single one of them is jammed tight. There must be at least a couple of hundredweight of fanzines alone as well as shelf after shelf of prozines (Walt is inclined to proziness), and bound books.

The main piece of furniture is the writing-desk. This started life as an old-fashioned, marble-topped washstand until Madeleine bought it at an auction for £2. In true stefnic fashion she placed the typer onto the marble and the thing was transformed into a writing-desk. And a very fine one too, --- it has more drawers, shelves and cupboards than would be found in a dozen prosiac desks, and a large mirror at the back with a flattering "Fan-Face No.1. at its bottom edge. My face seemed to fit that mirror.

The rest of the furniture, -- four chairs a small table, and two waste-paper baskets, are scattered around the edges of the room so that the centre is clear. There is no floor-covering, - just the bare black and brown stained boards. (The brown is oak-stain, the black is printer's ink.)

The parts of the walls that aren't covered by bookshelves are decorated with pictures. The piece of resistance is a 3' by 2' portrait of a French poule. It's a remarkably fine painting, and I was surprised and pleased to discover that James

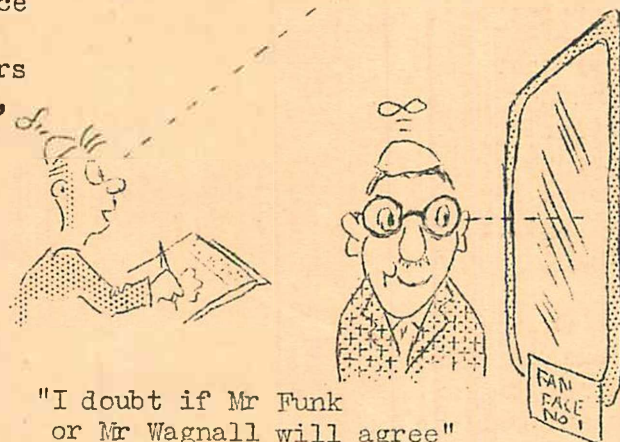
had done it as a sort of fannish sublimation. I'd imagined that he never drew anything except spaceships that resembled ball-point pens. There is one of these too, but that's just an ordinary thing of the type that any good prozine might feature on its cover. I didn't know before this that James had so much artistic talent. If he hadn't been having trouble with his eyes and had to give up painting, I would have been after him for some serious artwork for Hyphen. It's a pity about his eyes, -- but he finds it easier and a lot more profitable to spend his time writing.

Just to the left of the door there's the fannish portrait gallery. Walt's a completist for photographs.....Hoffman, Grennell, Mahaffey, Bloch, Tucker, 4e, --they're all here. I think the only fanface I couldn't find was Burbee.

But this isn't just Walt's room though. I do not believe that Bob was kidding when he said that he hated the way Willis walks around as if he owns the place. I myself, even though I was only there for two weeks, had a sense of "ownership" about it, -- as if I'd planned it myself, right down to the little details like the Marilyn Monroe calendar between the windows, and the rocket with a long exhaust trail that Bob painted on the other mirror to disguise the crack.

Ghod, this is still Tuesday.

After lunch, we left Madeleine to do the dishes and went with James, George and Peggy to Shaw's Bridge. This was in no way a pilgrimage, -- it's just a local beauty spot and is not named after Bob. The Lagan, the river that Belfast is built around, is a smaller, more rural stream up here, and the river banks are another favourite spot with the London excursionists. But all we came for was the scenery.



Fortunately we seemed to be the only people there during the afternoon. If it had been otherwise, I don't know how we would have explained away James. The rest of us leaned on the parapet of the bridge and watched solemnly whilst James cut a twig and then stood in the middle of the arch with his dowsing rod and discovered the Lagan beneath his feet. We almost came home to write to Manly Banister about it.

Once we'd found the river, the obvious thing to do was sail paper boats on it. So we did so. I don't know if we designed them wrongly or whether we had unconsciously imitated a Bert Campbell invention, but our paper boats metamorphosed into gliders as we dropped them from the bridge and went sailing off on the breeze instead of on the water. We said to hell with it and began to walk along the riverbank.

When it comes to riverbanks, it must be admitted that the excursionists have pretty good taste. The Lagan is a very slow, lazy river with a border of trees leaning over to stroke the waters with their branches. It was very pleasant and it suited our mood.

Unfortunately the idyll didn't last very long. Swarms of flies decided to, well, swarm, and we were forced back into fanning again. We used bunches of grass this time, but they weren't a lot of help.

The others had brought some food with them, so we climbed a small hillock and helped them to dispose of it. We built a small fire out of old convention programmes (honest!) but it seemed to attract the midges and repel us. Eventually we had to quit and fled down the towpath in retreat.

As we got nearer to Belfast, the river lost its rural look and the reedy fringes were replaced by concrete banks. Less aesthetic perhaps, but a lot easier to walk on.

For all I know it may be illegal to pun outside the city limits, or perhaps it was the ferry that started it. This was just a rowing boat behind a house. Walt made a gallant effort, but he didn't get any farther than "Ferries at the.." before we chorused the rest of it for him. He looked subdued and beaten. Peggy was slightly ahead of us and singing softly to herself. As we passed some swans, George suggested that she needed a cygneture tune, somebody else suggested follow-the-Leda, and everything was back to normal again.

When we got home, Bob and Sadie had arrived, and we decided to go up to the attic for a ghoddminton tournament. Ghoddminton is the sole reason for the collapse of SLANT and the irregular publishing schedule of HYPHEN. It's played on every occasion when it's possible to muster a fivesome (four players and a non-combatant referee), and goes on for set after set until somebody is maimed or collapses from exhaustion. It's no new craze like "Scrabble" or "Canasta" -- it began, years ago, in Walt's office, and he introduced it to the others and formulated a set of rules. The others promptly changed the rules to fit the attic and put themselves on equal terms with Willis.

Basically, the game is a little like table tennis. But not much. A table tennis net is stretched chest-high between the printing press and a chair, and the small table is placed under the net to keep the players apart. A badminton shuttlecock in the last stages of moulting takes the place of a ball and the racquets are squares of heavy card board. A set consists of three games. I sincerely believe that it is beyond the limits of human endurance to play more than two sets running.

The rules of the game are as follows.....

RULES OF GHODMINTON

(As amended at a meeting of the Governing
Body on 6th July 1954, George ATW Charters
dissenting)

1. The score shall be kept as in table tennis.
2. The boundaries of the court shall be the edge of the mirror at the North End and Marilyn Monroe's navel at the South End.
3. Services must be hit upward. If in the opinion of a noncombatant the service was hit downwards, or if the opponents protest vehemently enough, the service shall be taken again. A point shall not be lost for a low service, except that the opponents may elect to play it.
4. It shall be illegal to serve the shuttle against the ceiling and the server shall lose the point.
5. The shuttle shall be out of play only if it has struck the floor or come to a state of rest elsewhere.
6. It shall be illegal to move completely into the opponent's court to obstruct his play.
7. It shall be illegal to throw heavy objects at the opponent or to knock the shuttle out of his hand before he has served.
8. A service which strikes the opponent on the face shall count as a point against the server.
9. (Amendment). It shall be illegal to hold the shuttle in one's hand during a rally or to cover it completely with the hand and the bat to prevent the opponent from disturbing it. This rule may be dispensed with in particular games in which George ATW Charters is participating with the consent of those members of the Governing Board present.
10. Apart from the above rules there shall be no restriction on the initiative of players. The shuttle may be hit any number of times in any position with any part of the body and advantage may be taken of any natural hazards in the opponent's court, such as bookcases. (Note; a shot which lodges inside a bookcase is however deemed to be out), pictures etc. Any means including physical violence may be used to prevent the opponent playing the shuttlecock, subject to the provisions of Rules 6 and 7.

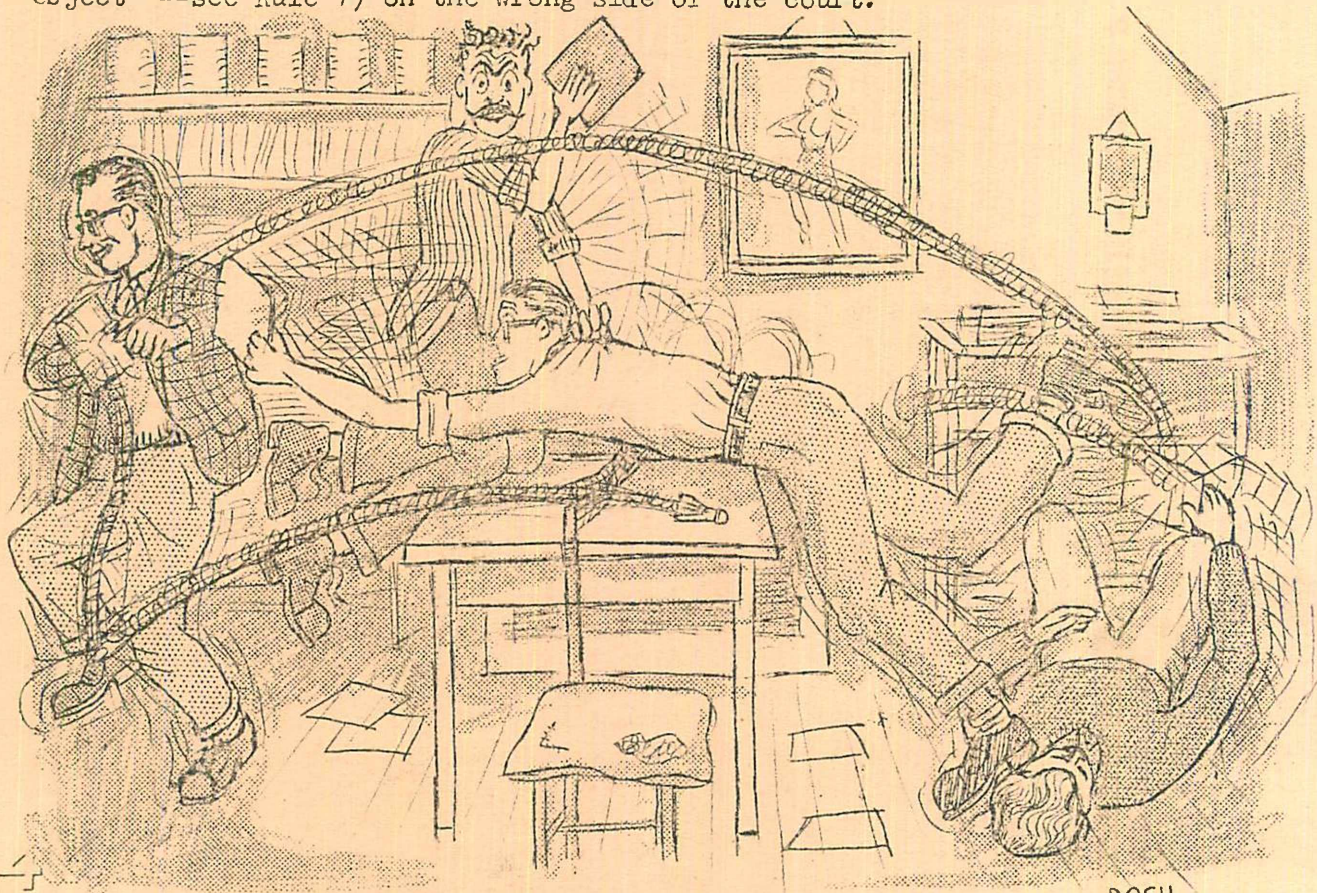
((My thanks are due to the Governing Board for permission to publish these.))

It should be noted that this is not a jolly little family game. The rules are strictly adhered to, and the players have a fierce determination to wipe the floor, literally, with the other side. Every set is played with an air of grim seriousness punctuated by spasms of hysterical laughter. We usually played mixed doubles and there is no nonsense about gallantry towards the ladies. The first time I played, I thought it was just a game where you patted a shuttlecock from

one side of the net to the other, and made sympathetic cooing noises to the girls when they missed it. They knocked that damn nonsense out of me whilst we were still playing for service.

If I could, I played with Madeleine as my partner. It was a lot safer having her on the same side of the net. You haven't really lived until you've seen this sheltered flower doing her damndest to knock her everloving husband's eye out with a shuttlecock or split James' skull with the edge of her racquet. You might say she plays an attacking game, -- and not only does she have an almost unreturnable service, but also has the enthusiasm to join me in a little victory dance whenever we win a point. Even George ATW Charters acknowledged our superiority at the game and our mastery at disputing his decisions as referee. And it must be remembered that Charters is no tyro at the game. It was George who threw himself into a rally with such abandon that his behind went clean through the window and he would have followed it if it hadn't been for the prompt action of his partner. It was nearly George all the way to the crazy paving three stories below.

Personally I never played in such a boisterous manner. The best I could do was shove my hand through the yard-square glass top of the mimeoscope when James patted me on the side of my face with his racquet. It was an accident, -- (I mention this because Willis has been telling his correspondents that his mimeoscope was destroyed by foreign hooligans) -- and it was a little disconcerting when nobody rushed up with iodine and bandages, but just stood there and argued as to whether I should lose a point or not for dropping my racquet (a "Heavy Object" --see Rule 7) on the wrong side of the court.

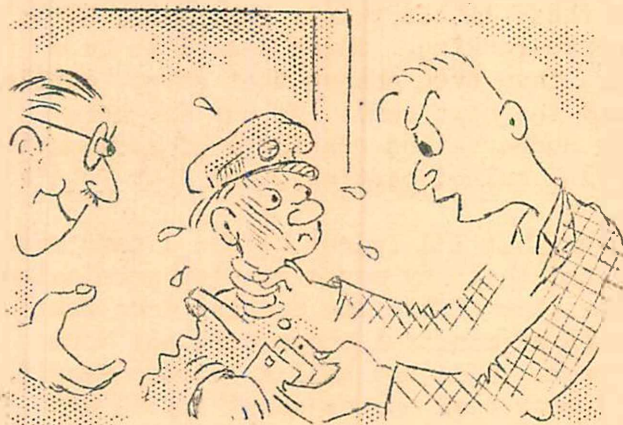


BOSH

We took it easy on Wednesday so that I could recover from Ghoddminton and the ill-effects of sitting up until 3 o'clock in the morning talking about sex, politics, religion, literature and faans.

After breakfast we went downtown to pick up the Varityper and some stencils and to try to book me a plane seat for my journey back home. I had a return boat-and-train ticket but I was spending no more nights on "The Duke of Rothesay" if I could help it. I'd been doubtful if I'd be able to get an air-passage at such short notice, but fortunately they'd increased the service and I was able to book for the Sunday evening plane.

The Varityper repair depot was just off Donegall Place, -- the Belfast Main Street. As we got off the bus and walked down the road, Walt suddenly darted ahead and I lost him in the crowd. I looked around for him and found that he'd cornered a postman in a shop doorway and was demanding mail for 170 Upper etc.



This, of course, was highly illegal and Walt was liable to be clapped in the pokey for the next half a dozen fandoms, but he seemed to imagine that it was quite normal to accost postman in the middle of town and extract mail from them. We stood over the docile little postman whilst he thumbed through his bundle and handed over half a dozen letters and a small parcel. "Is that all?" said Willis. The postman hesitantly handed over another four letters addressed to me. "Thank you," said Walt, and we left the postman cowering in the

doorway as we went on to the Varityper depot.

Typewriter mechanics are the same all the world over. The machine wasn't ready, so we had to come home with just the stencils and the mail. Lunch was delayed until Madeleine had read all the letters, but it was worth the wait. We had Colcannon for the first time. I think that after I'd gone home, Madeleine must have been pleased to see the back of me so that she could alter her menu without me screaming for colcannon encores.

Although this is a remarkably simple dish to make, it seems to be almost unknown outside Ireland. Basically it consists of creamed potatoes that have had the chopped-up tops of spring onions mixed into them. It's served in a heap with about half a pound of butter slowly melting in a little hollow at the top. Glasses of buttermilk are served separately, and you can have meat with it if you insist on acting like a bloody bourgeois. Colcannon is wonderful. The only fault I could find with it is that there seems to be some prejudice against serving it for breakfast and tea. And, for some reason, Madeleine insisted on giving us steaks and things on other days when it would have been just as easy to serve colcannon. Women are peculiar creatures.

We spent most of the afternoon and evening discussing a one-shot that we had thought of doing for FAPA, and congratulating each other on how wonderful it was going to be. We drafted a couple of pages and then, about 10 p.m. we went up to the attic to begin cutting stencils. Madeleine was appointed Art Editor and began to get a Rotsler illo onto stencil whilst Walt and I cut the rest and began to run them off. It took about four hours, but most of the time was spent cutting the stencils and drinking tea. The actual duplicating took about 30 minutes for the lot. This, I thought, was the most wonderful thing I saw in all Ireland. The stencils were just slapped on and smoothed out, ink was poured into

the drum, -- he uses thinned down printer's ink, -- and the crank was turned as fast as it could be whizzed round. I didn't have my Gestetner at that time and I'd never known that duplicating could be so easy. I was quite sorry that we only ran off 100 copies. In no time at all, I had progressed from a mere novice to an accomplished crank-turner, and I was getting copies as legible as anyone else's.

We didn't stop to staple them up that night. I had difficulty in keeping my eyes open and the other two weren't in any better shape. We just left the sheets scattered around and went to bed.

On the Thursday we borrowed the Morris, filled the boot with food, put the kettle under the hood, and set off. Even apart from the scenery, driving in Ireland is an Experience. Outside the main routes the roads degenerate into cart-tracks flanked by high hedgegrows, and they are only just wide enough for one-way traffic. We drove for hours down these little twisty lanes and, altho' it was picturesque, it was occasionally nerve-racking. There seemed to be a curve every twenty yards, and it was a more than even chance that sheep, cattle, pigs, chickens or goats were lurking around the next bend. We saw far more livestock than people on the roads, and my conversation consisted of exclamations at ruined castles (the joint is swarming with ruined castles), and "For Pete's sake stop! we're surrounded by pigs."

Walt turned out to be a reasonable driver, but I'd learnt before I came over that there is no driving test in Ireland, and that any moron can get permission to drive simply by going into the Motor Taxation Office and banging down the money for a licence. I doubted if this race of minstrel bhoys were all born drivers, and I was apprehensive about my neck. I do not hold a licence myself, but really I am an expert driver because I once read a book about it. I sat beside Walt in the front seat and helped him along with little hints like: "Take it easy," "Change down," "Slower," "Start the wipers," "Careful," "There's no hurry." This culminated in an episode on the main Bangor-Belfast road. This has a much better surface, but is just as full of bends as the others. I thought that he was pulling out to overtake on the bend, and I mentioned in a perfectly normal scream: "For chrissake, there's traffic on the other side." It turned out that this simple lovable character was just pulling out for a look, had not the slightest intention of overtaking on the curve, and was so startled that he nearly rammed the car ahead. He only looked at me, but that was enough. After that I stayed quiet, and prayed almost inaudibly instead of helping him to drive.

Our first stop was at Downpatrick. We pulled up at the church and went into the cemetery to see St. Patrick's grave. It's not very much to see, -- just a huge, flat, untrimmed boulder with "Patric" chiselled into the granite, -- but people come here on pilgrimage from all over the world. And not just Catholics either, -- St. Patrick is claimed by the Protestants as the founder of their "Church of Ireland" (on the grounds that he never submitted to Rome or something) and they revere the spot too. And, agnostics like myself turn up to take a lookand wonder...

The thing I liked best about Downpatrick was the uncommercial attitude to the sacred relics behind the church. There were no vendors of religious trinkets, no clergymen waiting to save us, no collection boxes for freewill offerings. It was just a quiet country churchyard with the most simple, most effective grave-stone I've yet seen. There were no Floral Tributes on it, -- just the stone lying in the untrimmed grass, with a small yew tree shading it, and surrounding it the graves of unknown labourers who once lived in the parish. I am not

usually a graveyard addict, -- I can never forget what lies underneath the grass, --but I liked this one. It compares favourably with the English versions too, -- the last time I went to Stoke Poges, there was an itinerant photographer wanting to take a picture of me beneath those rugged elms and another guy outside trying to sell me a copy of the elegy. (I told him I already had one.)

We left Downpatrick and carried on southwards. We stopped at the top of the first hill, and there, a steel-blue shadow filling the horizon, were the Mourne Mountains. Anything I said about these would be a cliché, but once you've seen them you know immediately why the Irish sing so many songs about them. It isn't a very high range, -- Walt and Madeleine climbed most of the peaks when they were courting (a damn queer technique), but they are very impressive and very beautiful.

They were still a good twenty miles ahead of us though, so we decided to have something to eat before going any further. We found a small copse by the roadside, and Walt and Madeleine unloaded the car whilst Carol and I collected wood for a fire. We spread the car rugs over a fallen tree-trunk, brewed tea, and had a picnic. It's a lot more fun to eat in this fashion than it is sitting behind a table, --- and there are no dishes to wash afterwards.

I'd borrowed my sister's camera for the holiday and took a couple of pictures of them sitting in the glade with the sunlight dappling (I'm sorry, but it was dappling) through the branches. I didn't, and still don't, know the slightest thing about photography, but any moron could see that this was an ideal set-up for camerawork. The results, I thought, would make Grennell green with envy. I changed places with Madeleine so that she could use up the rest of the film. But Dean wasn't green after all, -- it wasn't until several days later that James discovered that the damn camera hadn't been working.

After we'd finished and had stamped the fire out, we set off again. As we went along, Walt was trying to explain the derivations of the village place-names through which we passed. Downpatrick was easy enough, Bloody Bridge was named after an ambush during the troubles, but others, Kilkeel or Annalong for instance, needed a knowledge of Gaelic. Walt doesn't have this, -- all he really knows of the language is how to count from one to ten, or wish people a hundred thousand greetings ("Cead mille fearle!"), but he managed quite well with the help of a little book that explained prefixes and suffixes. Carol was being very quiet in the backseat (because the dolls were sleeping), but as we passed through Hilltown she joined in the conversation and carefully explained the derivation of the name for my benefit.

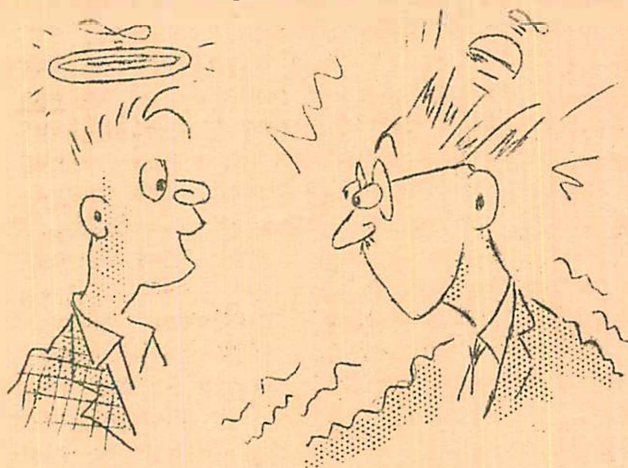
Out here we were in the foothills of the mountains. The cottages began to disappear, and the cultivated farmlands gave way to moor, bog, and mountain. The peaks towered above us and apart from a few sheep cropping the lower slopes, there was nothing to take the edge of desolation off the scenery. We stopped the car so that I could fool some more with the camera. We had climbed quite high and behind us the whole of County Down was spread out like an aerial map with nothing moving except the rapids in the valley below the road.

As we stood there, Walt asked me what I thought of Ireland. I thought about it for a few seconds, but there didn't seem to be any adequate reply, and I disgraced myself for ever by saying: "It's....it's green." But it is, ---and although it may not have been a very profound answer, at least it was true.

It was getting late now and we had to think about getting home to Belfast. The only other road through the middle of the mountains belongs to the Belfast Water Commissioners. We had intended to travel on this so that I could see Silent Valley and some more of the peaks. Unfortunately there was an enormous pair of 17

iron gates barring the road. We stopped the car, (There wasn't anything else that we could do) and Walt got out to see if they were locked. They were. There was a house just off the road on the other side so he rattled the gates trying to attract attention, but nobody seemed to be home. We were determined to get permission to use the road if we possibly could. He managed to pull up the iron bolt from its socket in the ground, and when he pushed at the gate afterwards the lock slipped free and it swung open. Walt was very pleased about this but it didn't help him any, -- he went over to the house, but couldn't find anyone to speak to. He came back, carefully pulled the gates together again and reversed onto the coast road. Personally I would have used the waterboard's road without bothering for permission, but apparently there was another gate at the far end and some comic official with a warped sense of humour might have gotten a kick out of sending us all the way back again if we'd tried it.

However, if we hadn't come back by the coast road I would never have spotted the Mountains of Mourne sweeping down to the sea, ---and Walt would never have been able to suggest that I write to the National Geographical Society about it.



"And our next Project will be an anthology of Wansborough poems."

Even after an enormous dose of undiluted scenery like the Mourne Mountains, I was still far from satisfied. We were up quite early again the next morning, and as soon as we'd finished breakfast and the mail, we were off in the car again. This time we went northwards. I had decided that we would probably survive if Walt drove the car all by himself, so I appointed myself Navigator. This was a sinecure on the outward trip, --the road skirted the sea for 50 or 60 miles before we had to turn off, and I was map-reading like an expert. I admit there may have been a few miscalculations but I can hardly be blamed for cartographers' errors or the whimsical peasantry who switch town names just to bitch things up for the tourist trade.

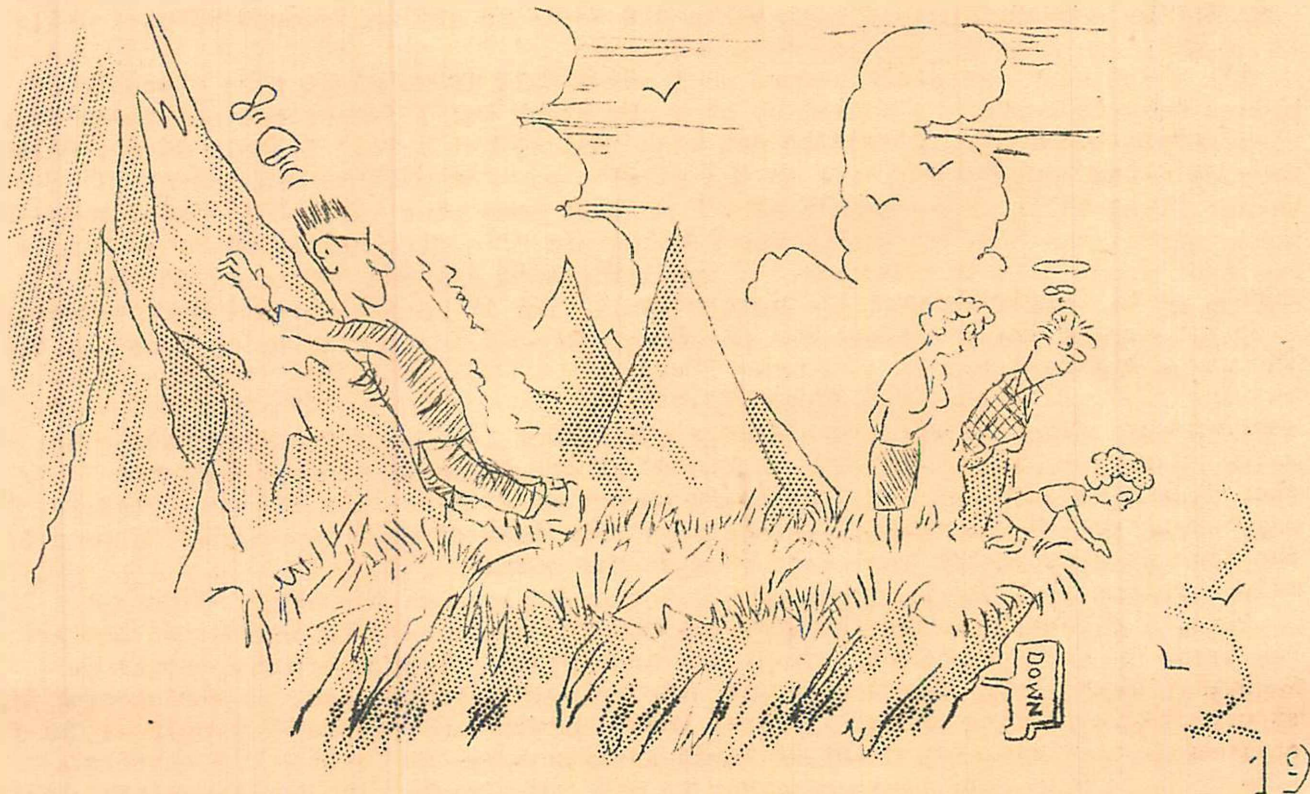
Sure enough, Carrickfergus was right where it was supposed to be, but we didn't stop to inspect the Norman castle (it had been used as an air-raid shelter during the war), but hastened on to Eden. There were barely a half-dozen houses here, but luckily one of them was a postoffice so we were able to send postcards about serpents and fig-leaves. Soon after we left Eden, it began --appropriately, --to rain. Carol and I were pretty sore about this because the car-windows had to be closed, and we were reduced to blowing at the sails of the toy windmill Madeleine had bought for us, instead of sticking it out of the window to make it spin. By the time we stopped for some food, I had a stitch in my side as if I'd run a ten-mile marathon.

This, incidentally, was the Donegal Road that Bea Mahaffey travelled along. Bea seems to have gone down into Irish history along with Brian Boru and Mother Machree. Even the Ballgawley Castle Hotel's sole claim to fame is that Bea stopped there to ring up BoSh. I was half-expecting to see little roadside shrines erected over empty Chesterfield packets that once littered the gutter.

The next halt was at a little black fullstop called The Blowhole. The road here had been cut through the cliff and there was a steep embankment on either side. We stopped the car and climbed up. From the road it was just a 20' ridge, but on the other side it was a sheer drop of about 300' to the sea and the boulder-strewn base.

I know this is despicable and probably unfannish of me, but I am scared rigid of heights; sweat breaks out on my forehead, I get butterflies in my stomach, and an undeniable urge to make tracks for the nearest Gentlemen's Toilet. I stood there for thirty eternal crawling seconds and I hated Ireland. Neither Walt nor Madeleine knew about this thing of mine for heights, and they were busy pointing out the coast of Scotland across the channel. I sat down very very carefully, dug my heels into the scree and fought down the impulse to be sick. I grabbed two handfuls of grassroots and concentrated on appreciating the coast of Scotland. "That's the Mull of Kintyre," he said. "Yeah, I said, "Very nice too." He stood there drinking in the view and sniffing at the fresh air. Madeleine was right on the very edge of the cliff, --cliff, hell, precipice, -- and wanted me to join her and see the waves creaming over the rocks below. "No," I said, "I can see much better from up here." I shut my eyes tightly and tried not to think about the waves creaming over the rocks below. When I opened them again, Carol was doing a creditable imitation of a mountain goat. She'd found a dog-rose growing in a sheltered nook on the cliff face, and wanted me to pull down the canes so that she could pick the flowers. This was a hell of a time for botany. "Come here, honey," I said, "I'll tell you a story. Once upon a time there were three bears, Momma Bear, Poppa Bear..."

Walt said: "I suppose we'd better get..." and in two seconds flat I was down the hummock and onto the road. I jumped the last eight feet.



We drove on a little further and then decided to turn off the coast road and cut through the Antrim Highlands to return home to Belfast. The rain stopped and the sun broke through again. We were pleased about this because with four of us in the car, the windscreen steamed up if we couldn't have a window open, and as this was another of those rutted curving lanes, driving was rather an exacting business. 20 mph was good going under such conditions, -- and especially so when I wanted to stop the car and admire the view at two mile intervals.

But, when we got to the main road at the top of the lane, Walt stopped the car without any promptings from me. Below us, rimmed by the road, was a huge saucer-shaped depression that was just as spectacular in its way as the mountains we'd seen yesterday. This was one enormous peat-bog and we could see across the basin for fifteen or twenty miles. It was a curious feeling, -- both beautiful and yet horrible. Within this basin nothing moved. There, for fifteen miles and more, there was no tree, no bush, no houses, people or animals, nothing to break the rolling sea of swamp grass except an occasional outcrop of granite and the geometrical brown patches where the cutters had been at work. I said it was beautiful, --- but you could never say that it was pretty.

Peat bogs, of course, are common in Ireland, but this one was much larger than usual. They are not the bottomless swamps that are known to every reader of WEIRD TALES, and although the mud would come up over your feet quickly enough it's improbable that you could ever be sucked right under. The surface is covered with a brilliant green reedgrass with the peat itself in layers below. Some layers are quite thick, -- 25' or more, -- I suppose the thickness depends on the amount of moss and stuff that is available to rot down and form the spongy peat.

The cutters dig it out in pieces about the size and shape of a house-brick, and then pile it up by the roadside to drain and dry out. The cutting is mainly done in the summer, because peat takes six weeks to dry and cannot be used while it is wet.

I'd never seen the stuff before so I asked Walt if we might take a couple of pieces home to burn. He pulled up at a dry stack and I jumped out and threw four pieces into the boot. I went to get back inside, but before I could do so, Walt gave me a few coppers to leave on the pile to pay for what we had taken. I rather liked that, -- it hadn't struck me that some poor devil had spaded those lumps out of the bog, or that I was robbing him of a fire next winter, -- but it was typical of Walt to remember. I upped the ante and put the money at the bottom of the stack so that the cutter would find it when he carted the rest away.

Then we went home, creamed the potatoes, chopped the spring onion tops and had colcannon for supper.

Up to this point my notes are pretty clear, but I've been dreading having to write up this weekend. All the Wheels of IF are in occupation most of the time, and Oblique House takes on every aspect of a three-ring circus. This is much worse than conventions, -- to give a fair idea of what happened, I'd need to write a separate report for every room in the house.

It started even before I got up. I tottered along to the bathroom to get washed and shaved, but James, Peggy and Carol were already in occupation and are sailing boats in the bath. James has brought the plastic motorboat that he bought in Manchester, and Peggy, with the help of a toothglass, is christening it "H.M.S. Egoboo." I gave up all ideas about shaving and appointed myself as Chief Tidal Wave Producer with Carol as First Assistant, -- at least I was getting a wash. Just after we'd discovered how to make whirlpools with the facecloth, Walt arrived. He approved of H.M.S. Egoboo but only stopped long enough to tell us

that it had a "full compliment of crew" before he went downstairs. Madeleine was the next to wade in. She didn't seem to notice that the floor was rather more than moist, but wanted to tell me that my breakfast was ready. I appointed her deputy tidal wave producer, went back to my room for some dry clothes, and then went down for breakfast.

The others also came down and were all in the kitchen along with Bob, George, and the rest. James was guzzling away at his sixth cup of tea, -- Madeleine brews the stuff by the gallon when she's expecting him, -- and took his nose out of the cup to tell me: "This is a delightfully infernal breakfast today."

The rest had been waiting for something like that.....

"Don't Faust that stuff off on us."

"Sorry but I've Goethe."

"I thought that was an infection of the thyroid gland?" ((goitre maybe?, -- they never stop to explain))

"No, bishop's wear them on their feet."

"No, that's what Churchill was invested with the order of."

"No, it's a disease you pick up in narrow streets, -- old crocs succumb to it."

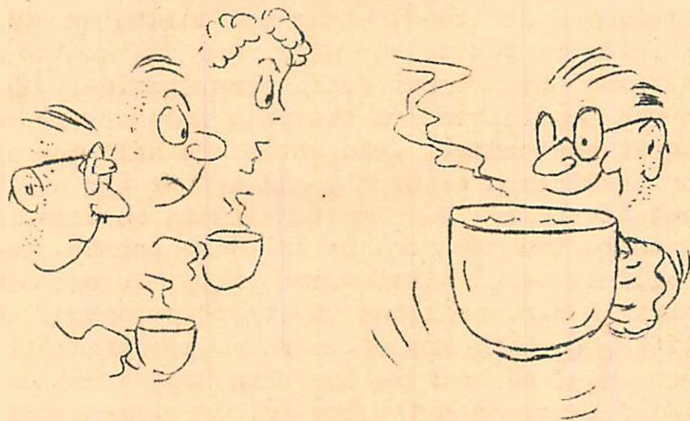
I quit then and fled into the front room, but they came in there too for a meeting of the Ghoodminton Governing Board. In the last tournament, Bob had won a crucial point by serving six shuttlecocks simultaneously. There was nothing in the rules against this so he appealed to their sense of sportsmanship. This shook them. As James said: "In ghoodminton, sportsmanship is a dirty word," --so they added Rule 11..."Only one shuttlecock shall be in play at once."

The meeting degenerated after this. George had been demonstrating to Carol how to skate little pieces of cardboard across the room by flipping their edges with a fingernail. In nothing flat, everyone else had torn up cards and joined in and the room was full of spinning pieces of pasteboard. By the time they'd finished it looked like Broadway after a tickertape parade.

But.... my stencil supply is getting low and I'd need another couple of quires to write up this weekend properly.....

Tuesday was the day I'd been looking forward to like a kid anticipates its birthday. Westarted off in the car early in the morning and went down into Eire. I was disappointed with the actual crossing of the border. These Irish can never have seen a spy movie in all their lives. Instead of armed guards with bayonets ripping through the car's upholstery and searching us all to the skin, nobody seemed to take the least notice of us at all. Walt pulled up at a little wooden cabin and got out to show the car's papers and then went through the same routine again after we'd crossed no-mans land to the Eire Customs Post.

But as soon as we were in Eire itself, things brightened up a bit. It looked foreign. The sign-posts and all the public notices were in large unreadable Gaelic script with tiny English translations below. Eire, of course, has broken from Britain and the British Empire, and England is still a sore subject with them. Gaelic is the official language and is taught in the schools, but as far as I could gather, not many of the people use it or read it, and it seemed foolish and irritating to have these large beautiful roadsigns that nobody could understand.



I don't know if the news had been flashed across the border that I was expected, but as soon as we were across we found a good dozen of the legendary jaunting cars standing at the side of the road. I'd imagined that these were just an obscure Irish joke, the sort of thing they keep for Hollywood movie-makers, and I hadn't expected to find a whole cab-rank full of them. I would have dearly loved to have gotten out of the car for a ride in one, but they seemed pretty frail things and I doubted if they would take my weight. And besides, I was trying not to act like a tourist.

Carlingford was our first stop in Eire. It's just a small village and, apart from the tourist trade, its only industry is smuggling. There is no purchase tax south of the border, cigarettes are half the price that we usually pay, and a lot of British "export-only" goods are freely available. Only a few of the routes across the border have Customs Posts on them, and the roving mobile patrols that serve the other roads are not hard to evade. Smuggling is a well-paying and easy game. Penalties are high, but the profits are big and worth the risk. I think it must be a one-way traffic though, -- I can't think of anything to smuggle into Eire except, perhaps, contraceptives. These are illegal in Eire.

We parked the car in the High Street and went shopping. We were going to have a picnic lunch so Madeleine and Carol went off after food whilst Walt and I made tracks for the tobacconists. I didn't like to go inside myself in case the "1/9 for 20" sign in the window was just a gag. It seemed ever so criminal and something for nothing. So, I kept watch outside whilst Walt went in. When he came out he presented me with a packet called "Sweet Afton." These are the only cigarettes I've ever come across that have a stanza from Robert Burns on every packet.

After Walt had attended to my tobacco supply, I decided to do some shopping for myself. I went to the post-office, -- it seemed strange to see green mail-boxes instead of red, -- and bought a couple of dozen stamps, and then went down the road for some postcards. It was only after I'd bought the damn things that I discovered that all my addresses were in the diary I'd left behind in Belfast. The stamps were useless unless used in Eire (it never struck us that we might have sold them to Laney), so we finished up by sending airmail postcards to those few addresses we could remember. Tucker and Ackerman must have been overjoyed to hear that it was a fine day.

Although Carlingford was just a little dump, the shops seemed to stock just about everything. The place where we bought the cards was quite tiny, but as well as stationery it sold sweets, tobacco, general groceries, nylons, imitation jewellery and religious statuary. All of these were either heavily taxed or in short supply in Northern Ireland. We didn't buy any of it though, -- except a sort of hard candystick called Peggy's Leg. It was very old, Madeleine said. It looked positively neolithic, but Carol seemed to enjoy it.

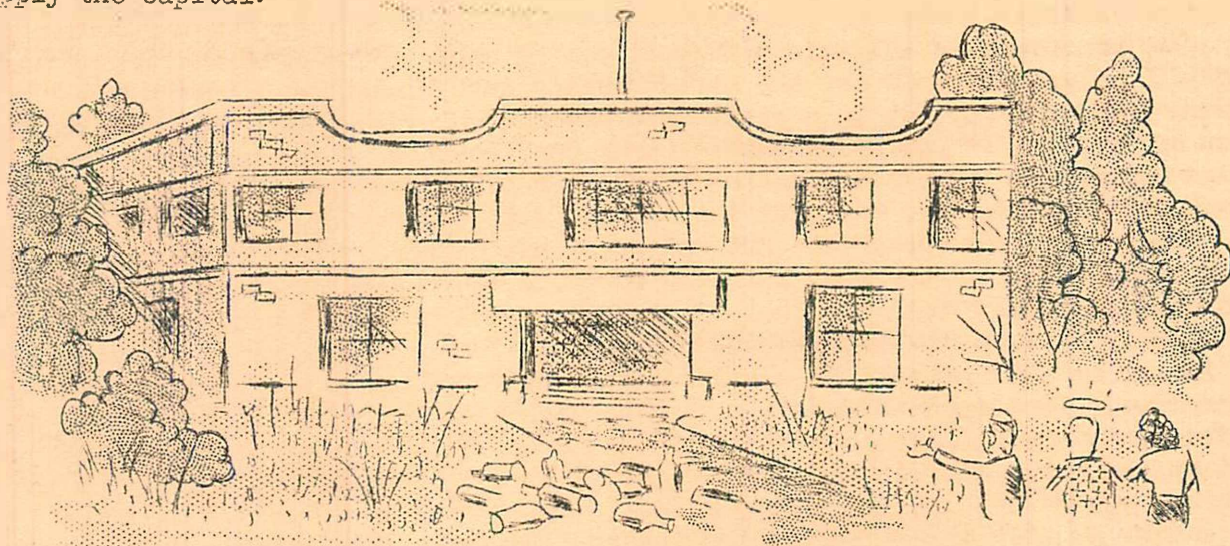
Further on we stopped at a farm for some eggs and then came down to Greenore on the shore of Carlingford Lough. This was a pretty spot; behind us was an abandoned hotel backed by Slieve Foy, the waters of the lough lapped almost at our feet, and on the opposite shore was the magnificent sweep of the Mourne Mountains tumbling down to the beach.

Whilst Walt and Madeleine unpacked, Carol and I collected dry driftwood for the fire. Walt rather fancies himself at fire lighting ("Look! One match!"), so we left him to it and Carol and I went off to collect sea-shells. We filled our paper bag and then went back to find lunch ready. It was a big lunch, -- eggs, bacon, sausages, tomatoes, potato bread, homemade bread, (but no colcannon) and we were all pretty hungry. We opened a tin of peaches for dessert and ate them

from the tea-cups. By the time we'd finished these, the kettle was boiling. We brewed the tea in it, and lay in the sun to drink it, watching a porpoise jumping out of the waters of the lough as it made its way to the open sea.

Walt began to tell me about the abandoned hotel behind us. At one time a ferry from England to Fire terminated just here, and the hotel was built to accomodate travellers overnight. Behind it was a small railway station. Trade hadn't been too good, and the ferry and the railway had closed down. The hotel was almost inaccessible by road and had rapidly gone bankrupt.

We went up to have a look at it. It was a ramshackle dump of no use to anybody at all except, -- and this occurred to us simultaneously, -- fandom. This was literally the Tuckerhotel, -- the perfect, permanent convention spot. It had everything, -- cheap booze and tobacco, hundreds of rooms waiting to be smoke-filled, no local inhabitants to be outraged, and even the lough for throwing pro-editors into. We walked around noting all these points, and then found some heavy metal gratings flush with the walls and overgrown with weeds. That settled it. Obviously these were intended as dungeons for Seventh Fandom. We rushed back to tell Madeleine that we were going into the hotel business and wrote a card to Tucker to offer him a third share in the business if he cared to supply the capital.



".....literally, the Tuckerhotel...."

We'd brought our swimming kit with us, but there was only a shingle beach at Carlingford lough and we wanted to find some sand for Carol to play on. The map showed a big, shallow bay to the south of us and we decided to move along to it. There was a choice of several cart-tracks and we decided on one that went through a hamlet called Whitestown so that we could stop there and post a card to James. We came to regret this though. The road was the worst we'd encountered so far, and when we reached Whitestown it was just half a dozen houses and there was no postbox.

However, the bay was sandy, and, although it was getting late, Madeleine, Carol, and I decided to go swimming. Walt thought it looked cold and wouldn't come in. We sneered at him and left him by the car, -- I even thought of kicking sand in his face, but he weighs twice as much as the traditional 90lbs., and probably wouldn't have appreciated the esoteric fannish symbolism anyway. I ran down the beach, -- at least I could impress Madeleine and Carol, -- through the shallows, and flopped down like a pregnant hippo....

It was freezing cold. Never before in all my life have I found the sea so cold, and I didn't stop to acclimatize myself. I was out in nothing flat and passed Madeleine and Carol as I pounded up the beach to the car. He didn't say, "I told you so," -- he didn't need to.

It was getting pretty late by this time and we still had a long way to go if we were to reach Dundalk and the Customs Post before the border was closed for the night at 9 p.m. We left the bay and were lucky enough to find a surfaced road going in the right direction. This was fine, but another trouble had shown up. We were nearly out of gas. Usually we filled up as soon as the dial got low, but in the morning we'd bought just one single gallon north of the border with the idea of getting the rest at a lower price in Eire. We had forgotten to do so, and had already covered more than 20 miles on our gallon. We nursed the car along, and coasted downhill whenever we could manage it. We were all convinced that not only would we have to get out and push, but that we'd have to stay in Eire for the night too, when we reached a roadside pump. According to the pump's indicator we'd been driving without fuel for the last half-hour, -- but with Ghod behind the wheel anything is possible.

We stopped once more to load up with cheap cigarettes and to fill the kettle from a roadside pump, and then shot through Dundalk and fled for the border.

The procedure is a little different coming back. The British Customs must know damn well that 90% of the cars crossing into Ulster have some sort of contraband aboard, but they can't stop and search every one. They rely mainly on intimidation. If you're caught it means confiscation of the goods, a heavy fine, imprisonment or even confiscation of the car. But, we were all heavy smokers as well as Free-Traders, and were loaded down with cigarettes.

The guard came out of the hut and began his patter. I tried hard to look as if I'd never heard of tobacco, spirits, perfumes, purchase-tax items or nylons. He glared at me so I told him that I'm very deaf and he said it all over again. "No" I said in my honesty-is-the-best-policy tone, "Haven't got any of those at all." I clench my fist so that he won't see that my forefingers are stained brown with nicotine. He turned to Madeleine in the back seat and said it once more. Madeleine has a couple of hundred cigarettes dropped inside her blouse and is just about the worst liar in the world. She blushes a deep scarlet and admits to thirty cigarettes in her handbag. "That's permissible," he said. Walt was standing outside the car so we had the routine for a third time. Walt hadn't any cigarettes on him at all, -- he had to get out of the car with the papers and there was too much chance of him being frisked, -- but he still managed to look far guiltier than anyone else. But the guard decides that we are part of the honest 10% and tells us to carry on.

We tried hard not to look relieved and were away down the road before he could change his mind. As desperadoes we hadn't put up much of a performance, but it was kind of exciting. We stopped once more to make some fresh tea and to congratulate and exchange compliments about our imperturbable sang-froid and then drove through the dusk to Belfast.

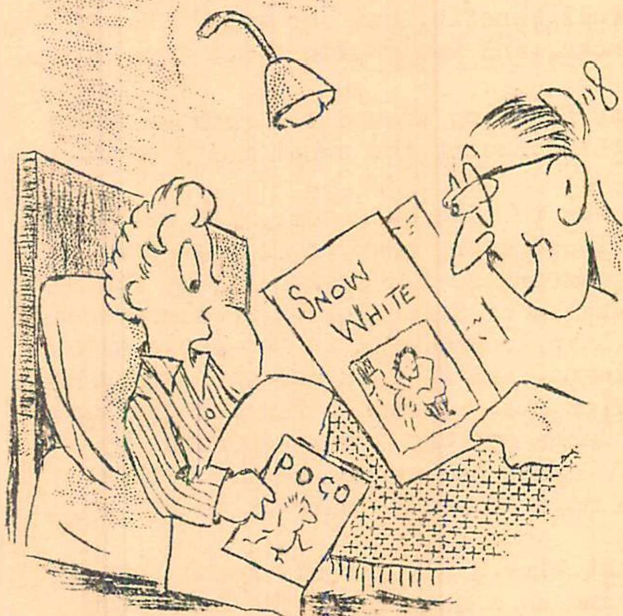
We slept late the next morning. Madeleine, Walt and I invariably sat around talking until two or three o'clock in the morning and nobody ever seemed to be in a hurry to get up the next day. When I did get downstairs for breakfast, Walt had already arrived and was sitting moodily at the table. He wasn't actually crying into his orange juice, but he had the kind of expression you'd expect to see after somebody had told him that GALAXY had folded and that Burbee had also bought a stamp album. I gave him my usual pleasant greeting: "Mail?" and he

nodded towards five unopened envelopes on the corner of the table, and pretended to be busy reading the paper. It looked like a pretty black day. All the mail had been for me, and not a solitary pocsarcd, not even a review copy of AUTHENTIC, had arrived for him. I was kind about it, -- I let him read my mail and even offered to send him a pocsarcd when I went down the road for some cigarettes, but he still glowered. Me, I thoroughly enjoyed that breakfast. Unfortunately, the idyll didn't last longer than my fourth cup of tea.

Walt's sister, -- a tall, good-looking blonde called Dorothy, -- arrived then to tell Walt that there had been a phone-call for him at his parents' house around the corner. I wasn't paying much attention, I was busy teaching Carol to count: "One letter, two letters, three letters, four letters, five letters...." but then Dorothy said: "From a Mr Ellison, a Mr Ellison of Ohio." It was still early and I didn't have my guard up. "Ohio?" I squawked, "Harlan Ellison? Walt you never told me you get transatlantic phone calls." I knew immediately I'd said it that I'd boomed on fansmanship again, and that I should have said "Yes, I was wondering when he'd call," but it was too late. Walt grinned until you could see his wisdom teeth on both sides. "They only phone me for important things," he said.

I picked up my five letters and crept away to the attic.

It wasn't until Bob, James, and the others arrived after tea that I discovered the phone call was just another benevolent gesture from Roscoe. There had never been a previous one, and it was just bad luck that it happened just at the crucial moment when Walt most needed a one-upmanship ploy.



We had decided to stay home that day and mail the fapa oneshot and deal with some of the letters, and we made like a couple of Trufans until the Ghoodminton Experts arrived. I was crippled in the very first set when Peggy tried to split me down the middle with the edge of her racquet, so I crawled away from the carnage and went downstairs to read Carol another installment of SNOW WHITE.

This was a regular procedure, -- Carol is too young to be able to read much for herself yet, and gets a 20 minute session of bedtime stories each night, -- and it's hard to say which of us enjoyed it most. This is quite a confession: Chuck Harris, The Terror of Seventh Fandcm, the Scourge of the Elsie Horde (it says here), was not only reading "Snow White" but was just as excited as the audience when the girl bites the old apple and swoons. I had to sneak a glance

at the last paragraph just to make certain that this was the old upbeat version that I used to read myself.

After Carol been reassured that really and truly they lived happily ever after I went downstairs for supper. I collected as much food as I could get on to a large plate and then sat in a corner with Peggy to talk about the best-sellers we are going to write just as soon as we get the time. It was an interesting discussion, -- especially after she remarked that I looked much better with my glasses off. James didn't like it one little bit and when he glared at

us and repeated for the sixth time that he thought I looked better with his glasses off too, we decided to move a few centimetres apart. "I suppose we must look like a two-headed monster," she said embarrassedly.

"I wouldn't say that," said Bob, "more like two one-headed monsters."

"And looking forward to the slither of tiny tentacles?" Peggy added sweetly, "if you must know, we were talking about writing."

Walt nodded. That was a reasonable explanation. "They're contemplating their novels again," he explained to George.

I explained that we were only talking about writing for money and that I had enough to do fulfilling my OMPA and FAPA schedules to keep me busy until we made the trip to South Gate.

"Why not," said George, "why not write up something about your holiday here for that. It might even turn out to be readable."

"A fine idea," said Walt. "It would make your name resound down the fannish corridors of time."

"A hollow empty sound," added James.

And that, buster, is How It All Began.

The peat that we'd brought back from the Antrim Highlands was still lying in the fireplace. We decided to burn it so that I could write about the sweet, musty smell. At first though there didn't seem to be any smell, -- the stuff never flamed, but burnt with a glow rather like charcoal. It made a pleasant fire, but there was no sweet musty smell, and I said so. Madeleine, realising that the honour of Erin was at stake, helped change my mind. She picked up a damn great redhot chunk with the tongs and started to wave it around under my nose. I tried to tell her that I'd got the full benefit, but she wasn't happy until the room was filled with sweet musty smoke, and you couldn't see from one side to the other.

Curiously enough, there was no ash or smuts floating around the room as there would have been from ordinary coalsmoke. Nothing except the sweet musty smell.

Saturday morning I went shopping for presents to take back home with me, and I took Walt along as a guide. We inspected almost every shop in Belfast and didn't buy a thing, -- not even a packet of shamrock seed. Eventually we finished up in the junkshops and second-hand bookstalls of Smithfield. We discovered a very fine pair of mounted horns that would have looked well in the attic with a little sign about the genuine, original dilemma, and a brass bed with knobs on that almost certainly had belonged to Queen Victoria. I rather fancied the idea of presenting somebody with a brass bed with knobs on, but I was returning by air and needed something a little less bulky. James had warned me about this: "You're allowed to take 60 lbs of baggage, -- more if you're married to it" so I had to leave the bed where it was.

After lunch we borrowed the car for the last time. I'd already found Shaw's Bridge and Whitestown so Ballywalter hardly came as a surprise. The next stop after that was Ballyferris, --- also named after a big wheel.

Scrabo is a hill that just misses being a mountain. I guess it must be about 500 feet high, -- and we climbed it. Or, at least, we climbed the last 60 ft, - we found another of those cart tracks and got the Morris almost to the summit. There was a fine view from the top with the village of Newtownards like a toy-town directly below us, but we didn't stay very long because I wanted to see Tyrella.

25 We came down from Scrabo and set off southwards again. Enormous tracts of the country here were walled or wired off. These were the estates of Lord

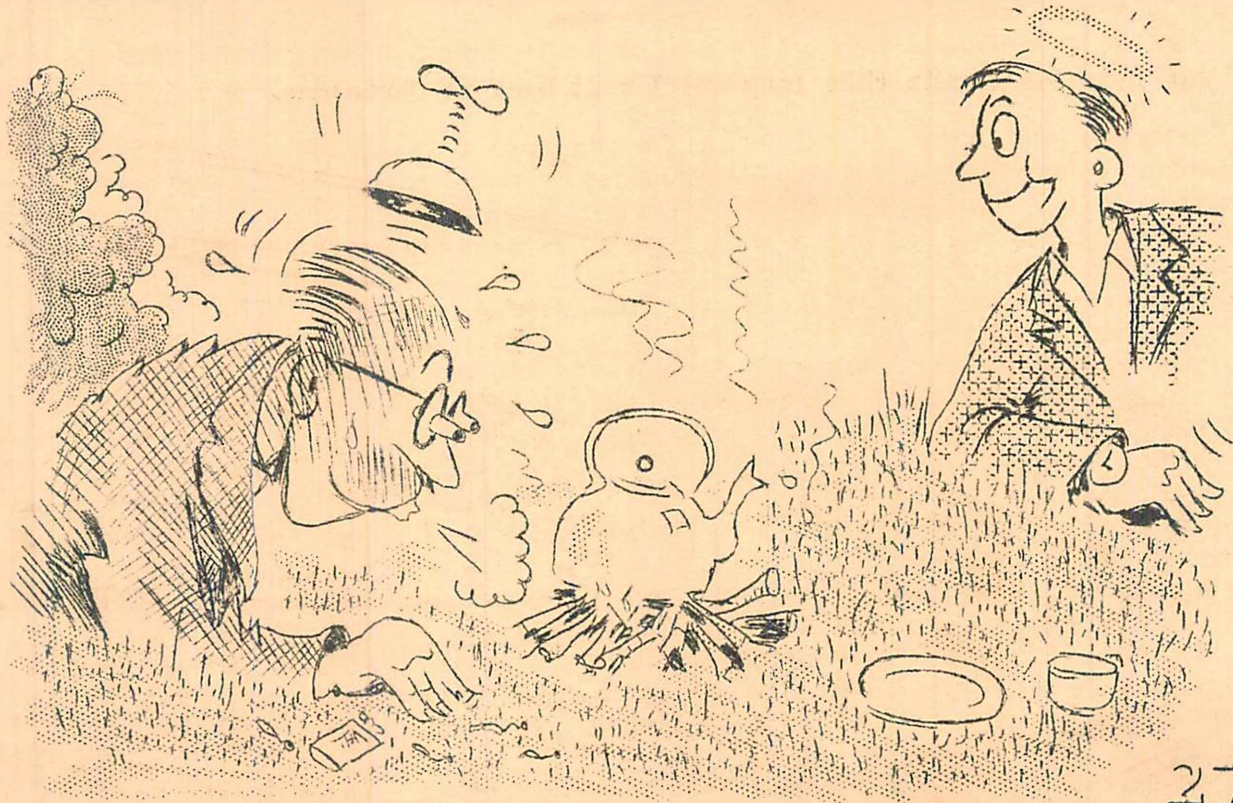
Londonderry, the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, and other aristos, and the walls went on for mile after mile until you began to wonder if there was anything they didn't own this side of the Dublin suburbs. But, this poor peasant got a lot of satisfaction out of being able to rob Londonderry of sufficient brushwood to boil a tea-kettle.

The tea-kettle, incidentally, was part of the reason I was looking forward to Tyrella. As this was my last day, I was to be allowed to light the fire, boil the kettle and make the tea.

Tyrella is one of those places that would make an ideal holiday resort if only it was more accessible. We took the car right down onto the beach and then drove along the hard-packed golden sand until we saw a sheltered spot in the dunes behind. We stopped, unloaded the rugs, fuel, and food, walked over to the dunes, and just left the car standing in the middle of the beach. We could see for several miles each way along the sands and there was nobody in sight; the tide was on the ebb, and nobody was likely to pinch the thing.

Back in the dunes I was presented with one match and the fuel. I built the fire and with the one match and some surreptitious help from my Ronson I got the thing alight, and found a couple of stones to balance the kettle on. We sat back and waited for the kettle to boil. We waited. And waited. I rearranged the stones so that there would be a forced draught. We waited. I found a piece of board and sat down to fan an even better draught. And we waited. Madeleine, overcome by pity or thirst, came to help me, and we broke the twigs into match-sized pieces, and placed each one carefully so that its heat would play directly on the kettle. We decided there was far too much water in the kettle, and threw half of it away. And we waited.

About two hours after we'd decided to have tea, the kettle finally boiled. We



made the tea whilst Walt instructed us in woodsy lore, and gave us a detailed account of cooking-fires he had created in the past. If even half of what he says is true, it's a miracle that there is a single scrap of fuel left in Ireland at all.

We hadn't counted on such a leisurely meal and by the time we'd finished it was fast growing dark and was time to go home. We paused on the road for one last look at the Mourne Mountains behind us, and turned north for Belfast for the last time.

Sunday was horrible. I was flying home in the evening and suddenly there was a thousand things we hadn't talked about, a thousand places we hadn't visited and a thousand things we hadn't done.

The inevitable goodbyes began early in the morning when Carol left to spend the day with her grandparents. I'd already promised to come back next year and we arranged to climb mountains in Donegal.

"Next year" set the mood for the whole day. When the others arrived we sat around and made plans for The Annual Excursion in '55, and I tried to tell them what a wonderful holiday I'd had, and failed dismally. I found time and space for just one more piece of gingerbread and then it was time to go down to the B.E.A. terminal and catch the coach for the airport.

They all came down with me. Walt got my baggage weighed, and Madeleine slipped me a phial of airsickness tablets. The other passengers were already aboard the coach and I was the last one. I walked to the door, and Madeleine said: "Are you coming back next year?"

"Yes," I told her, "Yes, I'm coming back next year," and I climbed into the coach.

But I couldn't wait that long and I went back at Christmas.

