

Childhood Memories - Arty O Leary

I was born in the Rotunda Hospital in September, 1925. My mother always fixed the day as the 29th, until I found my birth certificate recorded it as the 28th, and when I asked for an explanation for this discrepancy, my mother told me it was due to confusion about my arrival, it being either at the end of the 28th day, or the beginning of the 29th. This must be the cause of my finding life confusing ever since. My parents and older sister lived in a 3 bedroom terraced house in Fairview, where subsequently I and six younger siblings lived.

My earliest recollection of childhood is of my mother's brother, Uncle Ned, coming to my bedroom at nighttime TO SAY GOOD BYE - he was off to the U.S.A., never to return or be seen again. He promised to send me a toy motor car from America, and for a long time I spent much thought expectantly waiting its arrival, but it never did arrive.

We were fortunate as children to enjoy excellent good health. Before the discovery of penicillin and other vaccines and anti-biotics, which did not generally become available until after the world war, few large families escaped the ravages of a variety of diseases and ailments common throughout cities in the 1930's, e.g. Measles, Typhoid Fever, Diphtheria, Scarlatina, Chicken Pox, Influenza and perhaps the most devastating of all, Tuberculosis. I do recall at a very early age suffering from an acute form of Asthma, and struggling at nighttime to breathe. Our parents had little faith in general practitioners and considered calling on doctors a waste of money. They did however call on the local doctor to come and cure my Asthma. Eventually it subsided but until I reached my late teens, I was always uncomfortable and struggling for breath in stuffy atmospheres.

Attendance at the local Infants school came around the age of 4. I recall sitting on wooden benches in the "Gallery" and the lady Teacher showing the class a gruesome picture of Hell - Flames, Shrieking Bodies, Club Feet, Pitchforks, etc. I feared that one day I would end up there.

When a sister and 5 brothers arrived at regular yearly intervals, a task I was given was to take them for walks in their pram, which was bigger than myself. It was superior in style to the one used daily by Nanny the hawker who called regularly each morning to selected houses on our road to sell her vegetables.

For some years we had a servant girl or "maid" called Annie who looked after us well and with whom there was a good all round relationship. I recall her teaching me my first morning and evening prayers.

'Angel of God. My guardian dear

To whom God's love, commits me here

Ever this day, be at my side

To light and guard, to rule and guide, Amen.'

When Annie left us to seek better opportunities in England, a new maid recently engaged brought some of us for a walk into the town centre. She called to her family home in Gloucester Street, then a very run down street of tenements. Back home my mother asked me where we had been. When I told her she expressed her indignation. Apparently the poor Cailín Aimsire, conscious of the bad image prospective employers had of her address, had told my mother her family lived elsewhere, and she did not expect a child so young as I to know the difference between Gloucester Street and others. The unfortunate girl was sacked.

My older and younger sister were each week brought to Mrs. Mackintosh's Irish Dancing school. I was brought one day to test my potential as a dancer, but I became disruptive, and was quickly expelled for going along the row of girls and lifting up their skirts. One evening in the yard at the back of our house, I argued with one of my sisters as to whether boys or girls were superior. When she insisted there was nothing boys had that girls had not got, I showed her my thingamabob and she reported me to my mother, who in turn reported me to my father, who gave me a severe beating for getting involved with sex education at such an early age.

During my earliest years my father was a Commercial Traveller, with the Educational Company of Ireland, selling books to school-masters, clergy and institutions. A modest inheritance from his family farm went to pay off the share of the house owned by my mother's surviving siblings, and he bought two small houses as an investment. The spread of public and free libraries eventually put him and his company out of business and then the maid (and motor car) was replaced by a lodger, a Miss Walls. Later things got worse after he developed Osteomalacia, as the "hungry thirties" and worldwide depression and unemployment loomed.

1932, when I approached the age of 7, was the year of the Eucharistic Congress. My god parents, the Gumbrielles, brought me by tram, train and pony and trap to stay with my Aunt Mary, and her Aunt Bessie, by the seaside at Cahore, Co Wexford. My departure left space at home for visitors from the U.S.A., the Gannon sisters, friends of Uncle Ned. On arrival late in the evening, and sitting on the wooden form by the fireside in the cosy cottage built by my mother's forebears, I had to listen to a fierce argument between Aunt Bessie and a "Guest" from Rockferry, a Mrs Bennett, as to whether "Tea" should be pronounced 'Tee' or 'Tay'. It was a new experience to sample the simple country lifestyle then in existence. The friendly neighbours and locals with their distinctive accent. Most children would shun the wearing of shoes in summer. Front doors were seldom seen closed. Every week there would be a céol and rinncé session in some house or cottage to which all would be invited. The lifestyle, away from the influence of daily newspapers, wireless and motor cars, and with only horses or donkeys for transport, was that of centuries gone by. At dawn I would be awakened by the cock crowing, listen to the waves lapping the shore, visit the hen house to retrieve newly laid eggs, and smell the wild mint growing in the garden. I might help digging the "praties" and fill buckets with water from a nearby spring well. Watt Lacey, a neighbour would be either driving a few cows to or from their milking shed, or else shyly hiding somewhere doing contortions and making musical sounds with two small sticks in his hands. At regular intervals a two or three masted Schooner would anchor offshore, and two relays of barges manned by crews of strong men, would row out to it and load bags of coal which were then brought to the Pier and re-loaded on the relays of horses and carts, and brought to Sinnotts Coalyard.

Instead of sending me to the local Christian Brothers Primary school, my father, with misguided zeal, had me enrolled in an all Irish school, St. Patricks, Drumcondra. The Headmaster did not want me, as he had to cope with an expanding urban population in his own catchment area. This did not make for a good relationship between myself and Mr. Gallagher. I recall early on a teacher complaining to us of having the impossible task of coping with a class of 70 pupils. For me it involved a trek of $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles, each morning, and afternoon. I would bring bread and butter and a small glass of milk in my satchel, occasionally supplemented with jam, or biscuits. My first teacher, a Kerryman taught me the story of Life - 'Fiche bhlian ag Fás/ Fiche bhlian fe blath/ Fiche bhlian ag Stad/ Fiche bhlian ag Meath/, agus Fiche bhlian nua is cuma ann níos.

In fifth class I was most unhappy. The teacher treated me with contempt and derision. Years later he was dismissed for bringing boys back to his home. Perhaps he resented me, as I always had a rebellious streak, and he felt I was not one of his pets who could be more easily manipulated for his own satisfaction. My mother must have sensed my unhappy mood and she was also aware other local boys were winning scholarships with the local Christian Brothers. She brought me there, and although classes had already started, and I was behind in the standard required for a scholarship class, the Head Brother, whose nickname was The Waddler, received both of us graciously. Without any fuss or bother, I was enrolled for Secondary education, and to compete for an £80 Corporation scholarship.

Religion was a part of our life. Morning and evening prayers at home. Prayers at school. Daily Mass during school holidays. Weekly sodality and Confession. Novenas to help you pass examinations. Visiting 7 chapels on Maundy Thursday. One of the highlights was the annual retreat given by Dominican, Franciscan, Capuchin, Redemptorist, Jesuit, Passionist or Vincentian Fathers. I recall one sermon. "Do you know" the Missioner said "when Napoleon was in exile on St. Helena he was asked what was the happiest day of his life". A short silent pause. Was it the day he was crowned Emperor? No. Was it the day he met Josephine? No. Was it the great victory at Austerlitz, or Jena? No. His happiest day, he told us, was the day he made his first Holy Communion.

I share with Napoleon happy recollections of my first Holy Communion. The night before, it was late in the night when Jerry McGeehan, the local tailor who spent his days backing horses and his nights working to repair the financial damage, finished off my new and first formal suit of clothes. On the big day I called on every adult acquaintance I could think of, Catholics, Protestants and Atheists, to show myself in the splendour of my sartorial elegance. When I came back home with a record collection, my mother was astounded but she admonished me for calling on unbelievers. My confirmation was a lonely event because my mother could not at the time afford to dress up in a style to match the other adoring mothers, and I had to attend my Confirmation unaccompanied. The only reward I remember was the never failing half crown postal order our devoted Aunt Mary would always post for birthdays and big events.

There were 74 houses on Cadogan Road where we lived. I soon learned the names of every householder and there was a close feeling of neighbourliness. I had many pals living nearby and I lost no opportunity to get out of the restrictive environment of our own household to play in the laneways and adjoining streets. We would meet at the corner of the road and lane, which bestowed on us the name of 'Cornerboys' by some of our elders. My father was particularly scathing about "cabin hunting". On Saturdays I would trek with the McCarthys to Dalymount Park, to follow the fortunes of Bohemians F.C. My mother approved of the McCarthys. They were all Alterboys, and well behaved, but she disapproved of many others whom I associated with considering them common or a bad influence. The McCarthys did not go to Gaelic matches but with others, having no money seldom prevented us getting into Croke Park for big matches, by scaling the wall, or waiting for the gates to give way under pressure from the enormous crowd pushing from outside.

We had a variety of different pastimes for different seasons. In Spring, marbles were in and it was Chestnuts or 'Conkers' in the Autumn. In between we would lash Tops with a whip in the laneway, roll a hoop (Bicycle wheel without spokes) up and down the road, or try to snare pigeons by baiting corn in a noose placed in the centre of the road, while hiding in a porchway WITH STRING IN HAND WAITING TO STRIKE. The bigger boys played Pitch and Toss in the lane on Sundays while the smaller ones would "keep nix" for the approach of a Guard. In those days they were usually big men from places like Tourmakeady or Ballydehob and children were not treated with much gentleness. From time to time one would have to meet a challenge to a boxing match. My boxing adversary was Johnny Quinn, our height and weight being about equal. The result would depend on who got in the first punch to the nose, as both of us had vulnerable noses. We shared victory and defeat in about equal proportions. I recall after winning one encounter Mrs. Quinn came to our house and when I appeared she dragged me by the scruff of the neck to her house 100 yards away. Pulling me behind her to the back yard, there was Johnny looking a pitiful sight stemming the blood from his nose under a cold tap in the yard. My immediate reaction was to burst into laughter but I quickly realised this would bring down the wrath of Mrs. Quinn on me, so I contained my feelings, expressed regret for my actions, and promised never to do it again.

Fairview Park, only recently reclaimed from the sea, was a good facility nearby. There we could play a kind of cricket with a hurling stick and tennis ball, but we seldom had a real football or enough camáns between us to learn and play properly. Coaching the young was unheard of, even in schools. We often played "Combo" with a tennis ball in the laneway. When the ball would get into somebodys back yard it would sometimes be given back to us and others would confiscate it. Sometimes in Fairview Park we would find ourselves being attacked with stones and rocks by the East Wall gang. We would have to run to the safety of our own territory. However, if big Tom Tobin was with us, we would engage in battle and often with his formidable stone throwing ability, we would send the East Wallers retreating across the River Tolka back into their own territory.

My father, whose mother had died when he was 12, enlisted in the Irish Guards in January 1916, impulsively, influenced by recruiting propaganda, and to get away from the drudgery of farm life after a row with his father, whose wife's early death had left him alone with a large family to rear. He came to Dublin on his discharge in 1919, embittered by the experience of war, and to a greatly changed political situation. His volatile temperament, ~~aggravated~~ later by illness and unemployment, contributed to long and frequent spells of depression and bitter tantrums. I had to endure physical and verbal abuse from him, from time to time. My mother resigned herself to the drudgery of rearing 7 young children and off loaded one brother to her Wexford relatives. The household income consisted of a few pounds, the rents from the two small properties when my father was unemployed or in hospital. I recall rising from meals and still being hungry. Our basic daily diet was bread and butter. Sometimes it was Dripping, available from the nearby private Lunatic Asylum on Mondays - the residue of the roast beef dinners the community enjoyed every Sunday. I was regularly sent to Johnston Mooney's bakery shop to purchase "outside" loaves, which had an outward crust, and were $\frac{1}{2}$ d cheaper than "inside" loaves. I was also sent to the butchers for the cheapest cuts of meat, and to ogle the butcher into giving me bones for a non existent dog, for making soup. I also went to the Monument Creamery shop for "cracked" eggs and Gur Cake, a mish mash blend of fruit cake. If one of the young girls serving took a fancy to me, she would give me extra weight. When sent to Haffners for sausages, I would stand on my toes to feign extra height and age, and the girls would serve me ahead of all the "ould ones" who should have been served sooner.

I came home from school one day cold and hungry. I wanted some item of food on the table which my sister also wanted. My mother took her side and she got it. I became savagely indignant and ran from the house threatening never to return. I walked aimlessly for miles and miles into the countryside until dusk fell. I considered lying down and sleeping the night in a ditch, but not for long. I headed back towards the lights of the city, meeting workers going on all night duties. Coming towards midnight, the feeling of a good nights sleep in my own bed subdued my other emotions, and when I turned the corner of our road I could see my mother outside our house with the neighbours, anxiously waiting on my return home, and hoping I had not done anything precipitous.

My father's assessment of his capabilities as a fiddle player did not err on the side of modesty, and as he had an enterprising spirit, he set himself up as a teacher of the violin. Needless to say, he had few pupils. He then decided to learn radio servicing in the Technical school. With the help of his bank manager he imported consignments of radio sets (Andrea Radios) from the U.S.A. He then had to sell these to pay off his loan and make some profit. His habit was to get me to accompany him, and wait outside some house in the car for indeterminable lengths of time, while he used his persuasive powers (and he had a real gift of the gab) to enveigle the houseowner into an investment in this new technical wonder. He then bought a tenement house, where, as was common at the time, an entire family of 6 or 8, and in exceptional cases even more, would be sleeping in one large room. He converted the basement into a shop, to sell radios and batteries and do repairs. Being the eldest boy, I had the misfortune to be at his beck and call to get up on mornings not at school and open the shop to await his late arrival, or relieve him to go somewhere when I finished school, or leave playing with my pals on a Sunday to go into town and disconnect the Battery Charger, electric gadgets then having no automatic cut out mechanisms. Some of the vast numbers of unemployed and deprived youths would congregate at the corner of the shop and my father adopted a confrontational approach towards them demanding they congregate elsewhere. Any misdemeanours they indulged in were minor in comparison with to days counterparts. He called them "Bowsies" and they called him 'The Mad Landlord' The business could not compete with massive advertising done by a rival "McHugh Himself" or with a larger organisation who rented sets with options to purchase at 2/6d per week, which were mass produced. Another problem was when a customer complained to my father of poor reception from Radio Luxemburg, the first high powered pop station, he would jovially denigrate their cultural taste rather than trying to satisfy their wants.

My secondary education was undistinguished and incomplete.. I probably would have got none but for the Christian Brothers, who forfeited their salaries and lived on a small allowance which bought them a bicycle and perhaps a few whiskeys at regular times, so that boys in my circumstances could be educated for a yearly fee of £2. 7. 6d, payable in three instalments. They did not even get this small sum from some. There were misfits among the Brothers, as in all organisations. It has become fashionable to portray them as violent sadistic abusers of children. School regimes in the 30's and 40's were harsh and those in orphanages and mental institutions endured harsher conditions. However, lay teachers could dish out corporal punishment every bit as much as brothers. In fact, the most brutal treatment of boys was carried out in the most prestigious English public schools, to harden and train the future rulers of the British Empire.

Soon after starting at Scoil Seosamh, the Head Brother was replaced by a remarkable man, An Bráthar Tomás Munchin O Catháin. I made up some lost ground under his guidance and missed out narrowly on a scholarship, but our class got many. He taught Mathematics, Latin, Irish and Old Irish and combined this with administration and after hours games coaching and other activities. He extended the school programme beyond Intermediate to Leaving Certificate with only four classrooms to cater for many more classes. The school's academic results at public examinations soon matched and surpassed the more established prosperous colleges, and at football and hurling the school teams were a match for any of the Leinster colleges, and the school eventually won an All Ireland Championship. We called him 'The Goofe' because his facial features resembled a then current Walt Disney cartoon character called 'Goofey' . Some 50 years later, standing beside another of his ex pupils who was at the time the reigning Taoiseach, at his burial in the Christian Brothers cemetery in Baldoyle, while the community intoned the Salve Regina, I silently contemplated his epithet 'Ni bheidh a leithead aris ann'

Unfortunately, I soon got on the wrong side of The Goofe. I seemed to have a perverse habit of getting on the wrong side of all my teachers. This was confirmed in later life, on meeting an old classmate who was at the time the Minister for Education. He remarked how he remembered me at school as being the target for the continuous wrath of teachers.

When, full of patriotic fervour for the promotion of Irish, the Goofe issued a diktat that we were to speak only Irish in the school playground, which cramped the style of some of us intent on relaxing and not taxing our mental resources at play, some of us ignored this imposition. It soon became known to him that his programme was not meeting with the success he desired. One day, a lesson was abandoned as one by one each member of our class was called to an adjoining room to be questioned by the Goofe. I was the last to be called. He looked at me solemnly, and, condescending to speak to me in English, to make sure there was no misunderstanding, told me he had questioned the whole class to find out who was the bad apple who was frustrating his efforts. With one exception, he informed me, they had all mentioned Art O Laoghaire. Therefore, he regretfully had to expel me from the school.

Bringing this bad news home to my parents at that time would have exasperated an already tense home atmosphere. I said nothing and next day mitched from school, spending most of the day with a catapult, aiming stones at rats scurrying under the railway arches built to carry the Dublin - Belfast railway line across the estuary then being made into a park. The solitude enabled me to realise that the Goofe had overstepped his authority. The next day I brazenly went back into the class-room and sat at my regular desk. When the Goofe entered, upon giving me a quick glance, turned his head and said no more.

On another occasion I provoked the anger of our English master, whose name was O'Neill and whom we called 'Nailer'. He gave me six belts of his leather on each hand, for what I cannot remember. Being a smoker, and not too fit, I could see he was tiring and he asked me, with his face flushed, "had I enough". I defiantly said 'No'. He was too exhausted to continue and I returned to my desk.

A broth of a Brother, whom we called the 'Killer', although he rarely resorted to corporal punishment, on one occasion was checking my Drawing exercise. It must have been an atrocious attempt at drawing because I recall him standing behind me over my shoulder and saying, "O'Leary - during my lifetime of teaching drawing I have never yet resorted to hitting any boy for Drawing, but, I'm going to hit you"

My mother's housekeeping chores were never ending and she denied herself all frivolities to keep us all nourished and well clothed. Often she would work late into the night altering and re-making a coat or suit one of us had outgrown, so that it could be passed on, and nothing was wasted. From time to time she would venture a bet on a horse race, usually a shilling each way, and she was a follower of the champion jockey of the day, Gordon Richards. After a win she one time gave me half a crown, 2/6d to go on a "mystery" train journey. Despite the name, there was seldom a mystery as to destinations. It was in this case to Belfast, and I spent the journey in a carriage with a group of women, who kept telling me what a brave young fellow I was travelling to Belfast on my own, and not being afraid of being beaten up by Protestant boys there. Needless to say, these unnecessary remarks did not make my trip entirely enjoyable. On another occasion I went on a "mystery" trip by train to Avoca and Arklow, being the only young boy alone amidst adult revellers.

When War came in 1939, I was approaching the age of 14, and joined the A.R.P. local unit. In days when language was more basic and clearer I was enrolled as a Messenger, which nowadays would be called a Courier. When a bomb was dropped on the North Strand in 1940 we were all awakened. I put on my Helmet and Arm Band and was let through the barrier at Newcomen Bridge. It was a devastating scene as the bomb had hit the hard setts and steel tram rails in the middle of the road, spreading its impact against the old crowded houses on both sides. More than 100 were buried under rubble when I arrived. I sought out the Area Warden. He had no more idea of what to do than I had myself but he put on an act of bravado for the benefit of his subordinate and told me to go to the command post, the Charlemont Mall Library and find out if there were any messages for him. There the staff were coping with a crisis and the last thing they wanted to hear about was a message for an unimportant low ranked A.R.P. volunteer. When I returned to the scene of devastation it became clear that Army, Fire and Ambulance personnel were the only persons sufficiently well trained to be of use in this situation, and soon an order was issued to clear the area of all others, including the Local Defence Volunteers, but many locals, anxious for the relatives and friends, still remained to help dig out the dead and injured from the rubble. 36 persons were killed. War brought rationing, and the difficulty of each member of the house taking possession of their weekly butter and sugar ration, and securing it from being reduced in quantity by some other sibling. Fuel was also a problem. I remember coming home to lunch from school and my mother in the yard trying to cook a meal for all of us by means of an air draft circulating through a hole made in a sawdust packed biscuit tin.

My father headed for Belfast at that time to join the tens of thousands to avail of work opportunities which the war created. Life improved for me when our next door neighbours, the Sweeneys, invited me to spend week ends at their country cottage just outside the seaside town of Skerries. It was a welcome respite from the home environment and I looked forward to each Friday after school, and cycled the 18 miles there then, and back on the Sunday evenings.

Patrick Emmet Sweeney was the son of a Donegal Fenian. On Easter Monday 1916 he hired a Cab standing outside Fairview Church, on the pretext of going to a funeral. When the Driver called to his house his Cab was loaded with rifles and he was forced to drive to Jacobs Factory. The Cabbie was incarcerated there for the week during which the Insurgents occupied the factory. He continually complained and moaned about being prevented from earning his living and that his horse was unwell and developing sores. A platoon was mobilised to break out of the building and get a quantity of bran and oats from a nearby store. The horse was than poulticed and fed, and when he began to buck up, his owner began to shut up, and morale improved all round.

Pat Sweeney was sentenced to death after the surrender, but later the sentence was commuted to Life imprisonment. From his early release until the truce in 1921 he was fully active and his home was regularly raided. During Easter week his family had no food, nor any means of buying it. My mother and Mrs. Sweeney wheeled a pram across town to her husband's employers, Kavanagh of the Coombe. He gave Mrs. Sweeney a stern lecture on the foolhardy antics of her husband leaving a large family destitute going out to fight for Irish freedom. He filled the pram with Jams and other foodstuffs. Pat rejected the Treaty and spent the civil war period away from home commanding a group of what were then called 'Irregulars'. When Dev. and Aiken called an end to the Civil War, he rejected the call and continued activity with the I.R.A. His son Aidan spent a year in solitary confinement for I.R.A. membership and blowing up King Billy's Statue in College Green, for so long a rallying point for Orangemen. On his release, riding a motor cycle given him by Sean Russel, Chief of Staff I.R.A. he crashed in sight of Cadogan Road. The subsequent paramilitary funeral was the biggest event this road had ever witnessed. Soon after, Pat eventually resumed a normal working life, and one day had to attend a funeral. He made his way to Fairview Church, where by coincidence, the Cabbie he encountered in 1916 was plying for hire. The Cabbie made it clear he was no longer available for funerals with Pat. Sweeney.

Although politically poles apart, our family and the Sweeneys were the best of neighbours and friends. The entire Sweeney family fully supported and adored their father Pat, an ardent and uncompromising revolutionary. He was a man of integrity who showed me nothing but kindness and hospitality.

On reaching the age of 15, having passed the Intermediate Certificate examination, scraping home with honours, I entered 5th year for a two year term culminating with the Leaving Certificate examination, the ultimate goal of more than 90% in those days. I was a few weeks in this class when some of us were called to account by the Goofe for not having possession of a text book. We were sent home during the morning session to tell our parents that this text book was essential and we were not to come back to school without it. When I arrived home before noon with this news, I found my father in the kitchen bathing his diseased leg, an unpleasant sight. When I told him why I had been sent home from school, he went into a rage. He wrote a letter for the Brother, which I handed to him on my return to the school. I did not see the contents of the letter but it was no doubt a strident rebuff to my teacher's action. Nor did my fathers fit of apoplexy end there and then. On my return from school he announced he was terminating my schooling completely, immediately, and henceforth I would be available to open and mind the shop, and be his unpaid helper. School was not the happiest of places for me in those days, but now I was going out of the frying pan into the fire.

A programme to demolish the worst of the Dublin slums had started and families were being_re-housed_in new developments in Crumlin and Cabra. A demolition order was served requiring the house and shop in Gardiner Street to be demolished. My father could not, or would not, comply. Around this period he was again hospitalised. The Compensation Tribunal awarded him the meagre sum of 1 shilling for loss of his business, and rents from the house. To add insult to injury, the Corporation then billed him with the cost of demolition, which would be as much as three times the cost had my father done this himself. Infuriated by this, he found himself with no option but to challenge Dublin Corporation by taking his case to the High Court.

He persuaded a leading Senior Counsel, who was also an eminent Statesman of the time, Patrick McGilligan, to act for him. His only witness, acting as his technical adviser and Clerk of Works, was a big, rugged navvy or handyman, whom he employed when the need arose to do odd jobs. His name was Barney McCluskey, and he lived with his wife and 14 or 16 children in a Corporation flat in Railway Street off Eccley Street, one of the roughest areas in the city. Arrayed against them in Court was the Head of the Corporation's Dangerous Buildings Inspectorate, backed up by the Corporation's legal advisers, architects and surveyors. The Corporation lost, or, as my father put it more venomously, he "made muck of them". Leaving the Courthouse, ~~booyant~~ with a feeling of exuberance and satisfaction, himself and Barney made for a nearby pub where he indulged his exuberance IN THE ebullient way that was his in times of good moods.

Meanwhile I was going nowhere. Apart from the Civil Service and other public authorities, where competition was intense, few decent jobs were available for Catholic boys, unless their fathers were well established in the professions or with their own business. I answered newspaper advertisements and the only employment I could get was a job in Carton Bros., a large wholesale merchants. I was employed in the Butter Dept. and most of the time this involved loading and unloading 56lb boxes of butter and cheese for Carters delivering to shops, or picking up from railway depots. I was paid 12/6d per week, which was increased to 15/- after 6 or 9 months. I worked a 48 hour week from 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. and cycled more than 2 miles home for lunch, and back, each day. Saturday was a half day. Unpaid overtime had to be worked one day a week, to check in the returns from carters coming back to their base late. I was entitled to a pot of tea and a plate of bread and butter to sustain me at this task, until perhaps 8, 9 or 10 O'clock. Being young, fit, and hungry I would devour this ~~Ravenously~~.

The war had spread beyond Europe and into Asia and the Pacific. The energy of youth and lack of opportunities at home had prompted some of my contemporaries to go abroad and join in the conflict. I contemplated this myself for a time, but then decided to stick things out. However, my childhood had come to an end.