

(continued from previous page)

"Was he blushing, do you think?"

"He may have been! It could have been nervousness, I suppose."

"Do they ever actually rest on the bottom?"

### Fishes Have Memory

"Some do; perhaps only the tip of the tail touches, but some seem actually to rest on the ground. Some even yawn! What astonishes me, though, is that fish can come to rest so suddenly. They are going along quite fast and then suddenly they stop quite still. Fish have a memory for colour, by the way. That's been proved by a man who did some experiments throwing them sardines, then giving them coloured ones with cayenne pepper inside them. In time they learnt to reject the coloured ones."

"They never shut their eyes, do they?"

"No, they have no eyelids, but rock-fish hate to get out of the shade. They like the shade, and their eyes are affected if you take them out and put them in a tank."

"Do such fish keep to their own small areas, then, or do you think they move about from place to place?"

"They keep to their own areas. Of course I've no proof, but I think it's pretty certain. In Tahiti certain fish are edible in one bay and poisonous in another bay where they get different food, so that looks rather like proof, doesn't it?"

"When were you last in Tahiti?"

"Fifteen years ago—quite some time now."

### Echoes of Gauguin

"Of course you picked up echoes of the Gauguin legend?"

"Oh yes, there are Gauguin descendants around the island. It's rather funny, they have one road right round the island, and a man's address is simply given in kilometres. There were some Smiths, and one was 'Five Kilometre Smith,' another 'Twelve Kilometre Smith' and so on, and you'd ask 'Has anyone seen Five Kilometre Smith here to-day?' I never met one of them, but I understood that if you go a certain number of kilometres then stand and shout 'Gauguin' out will come one of Gauguin's sons."

"There was one funny story I heard about Gauguin. He evidently used to aid and abet them in brewing — and drinking—a fermented orange drink which was forbidden. And eventually he was caught and fined 100 francs for it. After his appearance in court he went round to the barber's. There was only one barber, and only one chair. When Gauguin had been in the chair a little while, in came the judge who had just fined him. So when the barber had finished the haircut, Gauguin ordered a shave, and after that a shampoo, and so on right through the whole list, until the judge stamped out. Then Gauguin said, 'Well that's the best 100 francs' worth I've had for a long time!'

"I also heard that Gauguin had a most marvellous W.C., beautifully carved, the seat and all, with the most delightful decorations. But an American woman bought it and had it burnt, because she thought it was indecent."

"I saw some original letters and papers of Gauguin's in Tahiti, but there was nothing anyone could publish because

many of the people referred to were still living. Actually they weren't very interesting."

### Ireland and the Irish

From the South Sea Islands, we switched the conversation to Ireland in as much time as it takes to put down *Blue Angels and Whales* and pick up *Lovely is the Lee*, the fruit of the time Mr. Gibbings spent coming down the river Lee, taking sketches for woodcuts and gathering material for word sketches of the Irish people he met. Mr. Gibbings is himself an Irishman, and laughed when we repeated the saying that all the best modern English writers are Irishmen.

"Is there now free intercourse between Ireland and England? Friendly intercourse? Would you have been as well received if you had not been born in Cork?"

"They're perfectly friendly. If you meet them as equals and put on no side at all you'll get a marvellous welcome. They're very happy. Even when they are very poor by our standards, they don't feel poor. 'We have the faith,' one of them said to me. 'We're the richest people in the world.'"

"What about politics?"

### Jokes and Money

"They'll get excited if you work them up, but I don't really think it goes very

hotel, and the bill was £4/18/-. The proprietor overheard the clerk telling me, and said 'Knock off those 18/- — we'll not have shillings between us.'"

"But you were one of them in the first place?"

"Oh yes, but they all knew I didn't live in Ireland, and they all knew I was a Protestant, and that made no difference. I found their generosity very touching indeed."

"Who owns the land now?"

"The land is going back to the people gradually. Ireland was planted in Elizabeth's time with English landlords, including my ancestors. The original Gibbings had three sons who all fought for Cromwell, and they got huge tracts of land. I'm not proud of that of course, though all that land has now returned to Irish owners."

"Do they still have large families?"

"In general, yes. When they can they marry very young. On the other hand there may be years of waiting before the sons are economically free to marry. There's a saying there that an Irish farmer spends the first half of his life wondering whom he'll marry and the second half wondering who'll marry him. De Valera is trying to do something about this, I think. However, longevity is the rule among the farming people. Seventy is young, 80 or 90 is getting on! One man I wrote of in that book, Batty Kitt was his name, told me he wore no shoes at all till he was 14, and when he got his first pair his mother had had to walk 20 miles to get them and 20 miles back the same day. He's 76 now and slightly deaf, but very much alive, keen, and full of fun. That man's diet when young would be largely potatoes and buttermilk."

"They have no cinema in their country towns?"

### To-And-From

"Oh no. Entertainment for them consists chiefly in going from cottage to

cottage. Two rooms are thrown open, for cards in one and dancing in the other, and they visit a different cottage each evening. The music is just a concertina—they call it a 'to-and-from.' They have no radios, except an occasional battery set, and that's only used for the news, because the battery has to go a long way to be charged. Their lighting is candles and oil lamps."

"But their life is full of fun and jokes, and their hearts are of gold. No other section in the British Isles is more moral."



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A Gibbings woodcut (slightly reduced) from "Sweet Thames, Run Softly"

deep. You'll hear English people criticise the Irish, but it's often because they think they're not 'good Englishmen.' Of course they're not. They're good Irishmen. They have a totally different standard of values. A joke is worth far more than a five-pound note in the country parts. I met a man at a party, and he told me to come to another part of the country and stay at a certain hotel. 'You'll get a great welcome there,' he said. I went and found he was the proprietor. But when I came to pay my bill, he told me to go to hell. I remember another time when I was leaving a