

A DUBLIN SKETCHBOOK

BOARDING the Irish Mail at Euston at 8.40 p.m. and settling into a corner seat, I somehow expect that the first person to join me in the compartment will be an Irishman; a natural enough consequence, I suppose, of being eager to get to where I am going. There is something exciting about the first glimpse of an authentic native of a country one is approaching for the first time; one hopes to observe the native in the act of homing, to see the nostalgic heart beat faster, the eyes brighten, etc., etc. But I fall in badly. He is friendly enough to be non-English, but his contemptuous gesture when I ask him "Are you from Dublin?" (why it should have been Dublin I have no idea) and he jerks a thumb over his shoulder and says "No; Here" is a revelation. I conclude that he is a commercial traveller. His advice on the customs, passports, and a sleeper for the return journey sounds infallible.

No, my first glimpse of the authentic homing Irishman doesn't come until, sleepy and warm at 2 o'clock in the morning, we pour from the train on to a wharf, and then the savour of the moment is all but obliterated by quite another sensation; the canopied wharf; the anxious looking people, none of whose carriages seem to have drawn up where they hoped; the ropes and cables to be tripped over; the seagulls riding on smooth oily wavelets in the patches of light from stern

Written for "The Listener"
by A. A.

portholes, waiting, even at that hour; the looming dark hull of the ship itself, the white part flooded with lights above. Yes, it could all be Lyttelton on a winter's night, and the ship could be the Maori. But there is no old-fashioned electric sign on the hill, if indeed there is a hill at Holyhead. And the name of the ship is Hibernia. At this moment, in a thickening press of people waiting to get into a kind of stockpen, I come to a stop, finding myself beside a young woman with the black hair, grey eyes and reddened eyelids and dark lashes, the pale temples and ruddy cheekbones, all of which I have convinced myself are Irish, and I steal a look at her labels: "Miss K. Donnelly, Roscommon." That seems pretty authentic. I take a deep breath and get my passport ready.

RANGATIRAS, Wahines, Hinemoas, Hibernias, they seem to be all the same, allowing for the fact that on a short three-hour trip like this many people travel without a berth; they bag places in the smoking room and lounge and try to loll in chairs not made for lolling. There is tea and rolls in the dining saloon, brought by tight-trousered stewards I have met before on Cook Strait. For my part I take a berth, at a cost of half-a-crown, which entitles me to a bunk and a rug in a dormitory over the propeller shaft, and

I lie there trembling and shuddering for three hours. It is all very familiar and queer. No less so when the engines stop at last and we do up our collars and comb our heads and go above with suitcases, and stand, all of us, like steaming sheep, on a rubber floor in an open space broken by round pillars, waiting for a double door to be opened and a rope made fast. We try to edge our cases a futile few inches forward; some in the rear consider whether it would be worth going round the other way; and someone puts a case on an old lady's toes. . . .

A green train waits on the wharf at what used to be Kingstown and is now Dun Laoghaire; a foreign language in a curious lettering on boards above the doors; men crying morning papers in an incomprehensible foreign tongue; I afterwards learn that this is nothing but English corrupted, but at first it deceives me. I have fallen in again.

The taxi driver, sent to meet me at 7 o'clock, is a garrulous bore, or would be if I came this way more often; but the first time, he is interesting. He gives me a lucid exposition of how we will take a short cut across the slope of the hills to the south of the city, with a



"I steal a look at her labels"

view of the whole of Dublin Bay. He says I will be very happy in Ireland provided I "keep off politics and religion." Where have I heard those words before? Certainly not in England.

Fingering my chin in the back seat I begin to think up a stumbling doormat speech about having meant to shave. We climb the hills. The only landmarks he can point to as the city spreads out below are a gasworks and something like a power station; and we pass Kathleen Ryan's mother's home; a film star, I gather. I am content to believe that under the mist lies the Dublin I know—Mr. Leopold Bloom's and Stephen Dedalus' Dublin, which I will roam in later. At the moment I'm more concerned with my excuse for arriving unshaven.

At a fine house on the lower slopes of a gently rising hill overlooking the
(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

In all of the Shakespearian productions to be broadcast in the *World Theatre* series.

The Ordinary Listener

Another speaker on the subject of radio presentation, E. J. King Bull (he produced Shaw's *The Man of Destiny* in the first *World Theatre* series) said that no audience in a theatre could be expected to attend in each dimension to every detail of a whole production. Although we have five senses, he said, they are easily distracted, and it is rare for two of them to act in genuine unison. From that aspect he thought *World*

Theatre would pay dividends to the ordinary listener, who is able to hear every single word—with ease and at his ease. In particular he is not confounded, as he would be in the theatre, by the operation of noticing the gesture, costume, lighting, and scenery of a production. At the time *The Cherry Orchard* was broadcast in England a friend said to him afterwards, "I don't remember ever hearing before the whole of what they all have to say." Another said, "Yes, I enjoyed it. I've never seen it performed, but I never seemed to get much out of reading it." These two points of view seem to sum up the main advantages of *World Theatre* to the ordinary listener.

The first four plays in the series will be broadcast in January, and for this month the shorter plays have been chosen. *Antony and Cleopatra* will be heard from 4YA on January 16, from 2YA on January 26, from 3YA on February 1, and from 1YA on February 10. *Coriolanus* will be heard from 3YA on January 18, from 1YA on January 27, from 4YA on January 30, and from 2YA on February 9. *She Stoops to Conquer* will be heard from 2YA on January 19, from 4YA on January 23, from 1YA on February 3, and from 3YA on February 8. *The Family Reunion* will be heard from 1YA on January 20, from

3YA on January 25, from 2YA on February 2, and from 4YA on February 6.

During May, listeners will be able to hear Shakespeare's four tragedies, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, and in June they will be able to hear *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Merchant of Venice*. By that time the NZBS hopes to have received a further batch of *World Theatre* productions from the BBC, for the series has proved so popular in Britain that further productions are still being planned, ranging from the classics of ancient Greece to the probable classics of today.



THE PRODUCERS—from left, Val Gielgud ("Othello"), John Richmond ("The Family Reunion"), Mary Hope Allen ("The Cherry Orchard"), Wilfrid Grantham ("She Stoops to Conquer"), William Hughes ("The Merchant of Venice")