

THE CANDLE OF DERISION

(By ERNEST A. BOYD, in *New Ireland*.)

The book of the Sage dropped on my lap, and I lay back in the chair dreaming of what I had read. By the act of concentration, it seemed, I, too, might project myself into that plane of being where vision and imagination would establish a contact with super-nature. A fascinating thought! I have but to fix my attention upon a point and . . . the candle upon my forehead would be lighted. . . . Just then I found myself in total darkness, but for the red glow of the fire. The candle of tallow had flickered out; I must find the candle of vision. So I thought of a white lozenge, and, as my gaze concentrated upon this mental object, a phantasmagoria of strange images flocked into my brain.

I saw an old politician in his North Dublin Georgian house, and he reclined upon the soft couch of Party journalism. Sunk election returns, when a chance advertisement on the book page of a Saturday issue flamed before his eyes, and the volume, as it were symbolically revealed to him, was entitled ominously, *THE LOST LEADER*. Horror-stricken the old man stared at this writing upon the walls of his last citadel, and faded from my consciousness. Soon I became aware of another scene, this time in a prison cell, and there I could see a dark lithe young figure, turning over the pages of a book. My instincts as a bibliophile were aroused by what I recognised as the brown and chocolate-colored binding of a Synge first edition, and as I wondered which of the two possible works it might be, the picture came close up, in the convenient cinematographic manner. I could discern many details, the first of which to arrest me was the name of the volume: *The Playboys of the Western Powers*. Then I noticed, as the pages were turned, that the frontispiece was a reproduction of the Sargent portrait, whose merciless delineation of meanness and hypocrisy is not to deprive our National Gallery of the original canvas. And I thanked the gods who endowed the trustees responsible for the acquisition of this treasure with a greater sense of politics than of aesthetics. There were other books lying on the floor, and these also bore strange though familiar titles: *Shredding the News*, by Lord Desees; *John P. Mahooly: or the Ass in Ireland*—a new volume in the series of "Irishmen of to-day." *A Shortt Way with Dissenters*, by a Cabinet Minister.

Without any transition I discovered myself once again in a Georgian house, on the south side of Dublin, this time. The drawing-room was filled with the usual anonymous collection of social climbers. Arts Club intellectuals, and "enlightened" members of the Garrison. They are grouped about the Poet, who, having talked of the dis-in-ter-est-ed con-tem-plation of life, is now introducing them to a marvellous New Game. As I watched, it looked at first like a species of metaphysical musical chairs. Clearly the participants were endeavoring to place themselves, before the talking stopped, on one of the 28 chairs set out in a circle. A difficult game, demanding a good memory and some intellectual agility. I was not surprised that a number of people failed to secure places. Finally, indeed, the number of unplaced people, living and dead, was so great, and the task of finding room for them in the circle became so hard, that the Poet abandoned it. His onlookers were invited to propose the persons who should be placed in the circle, and at this point a transformation occurred. It then appeared that the real difficulty was to find out the Poet's Idea, and the game developed into a series of wild attempts to spot a metaphysical pea under a symbolistic thimble. Needless to say, only the confederates, carefully scattered amongst the audience according to racecourse tradition, succeeded from time to time; thereby encouraging the others.

I hurried away, and in a near-by street, paused, amazed, before The School of Irish Learning. What had happened? It was now called "The School of

Anglo-Irish Learning," and as I wondered, the interior became visible. A class was present, and, listening to the instruction, I was able to understand the new function of the institution. Its purpose was to teach our returned natives how to speak English like Irishmen. The teacher explained how desirable it was that repatriated Irishmen should divest themselves, as quickly and as scientifically as possible, of all traces of Cockney English. He emphasises the disadvantages of the repatriate who tried to make a bid for popular favor, while retaining the solecisms of exile in London. He illustrated his meaning by pronouncing such words as "Armar," "Mariar," "idear," and giving their Anglo-Irish equivalents. He pointed out the necessity in this country of sounding "i" where it properly exists, and of avoiding its introduction into words where the letter does not belong. He also warned his students of the equally reprehensible error of giving an exaggerated Gaelic turn to Irish words, while speaking English. This pitfall was fatal to many returned exiles, who imagined that such devices were the sign-manual of Irishry, whereas no native of the country would dream of giving a Gaelic pronunciation to proper names which had been fully incorporated into Anglo-Irish speech. In order to avoid these gross errors, and to modify the inordinate tendency to incorporate mispronounced Irish phrases into Anglo-Irish conversation, the returned emigrant should take a course of instruction in Anglo-Irish. In any case, that step would help the subsequent study of Irish, whose sounds were threatened by serious Oxfordisation.

This grimly realistic picture faded, and I found myself in what seemed to be a cave, inhabited by legs and feet. I was surrounded by legs, and above my head was a solid roof. When I had become accustomed to my strange surroundings, I discovered that I was beneath a table, around which men were sitting in solemn conference. The portions of their clothing visible to me showed that the owners of the immaculate boots and well-creased trousers were members of the governing classes. It was evident that all were not of the same nationality, a fact betrayed by the cut of the trousers, the shape of the boots, and occasional glimpses of diverse uniforms. The presence of Americans I detected by the resplendent mirror-like shine of boots, washed and varnished by the skilled technicians of Transatlantic "shoe-shining parlors." Gradually the words being spoken above my head became audible and comprehensible: "Left Bank of the Rhine," "Czecho-Slovakia," "Gott strafe Trotsky," "Self-determination," "Safe for Democracy." These phrases impinged upon the ear, blurred in a confused murmur of concession-hunting. Then I realised that I was watching the Peace Conference delegates from the knees downwards, and as I noticed the pressure of Allied feet, the kicks and nudges, corresponding, no doubt, to significant glances across the table, I began to grasp the complications of Open Diplomacy. Suddenly a nasal voice boomed out in what seemed to be an allusion which must bring the speaker to the case of Ireland. But he had scarcely touched the opening chords of his Democratic Symphony, when a violent commotion took place amongst the feet. Such nudging and kicking, and even violent knocking of obviously Teutonic shins! An aristocratic British-looking foot, clothed in a white spat, firmly pressed the brilliant American toe-cap of the speaker—a gentle, tactful, and prolonged pressure, which scarcely dulled the glossy surface of the boot. Its effect was wonderful, for the speech, which threatened to cover certain awkward "domestic questions," burbled to a mellifluous close without any reference nearer to Ireland than Schleswig-Holstein. I had witnessed an act of subterrene warfare!

Whether because of association of ideas or not—the scene had set me thinking of Irish newspaper correspondents and this lost opportunity—I found myself face to face with a friend of the species. A Mangan-esque figure sauntered characteristically before me, as I found myself again in a Dublin street. This was he whose enigmatic notes were so constant a feature of

TRY—

Dom McCarthy

549 KHYBER PASS ROAD, NEWMARKET,
AUCKLAND.
For High-class Tailoring