



TOMÁS BAIRÉAD PAPERS

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Galway County Council Archives

Life lines

G.P. 144

GAN BAISTEADH

by Tomás Bairéad/Sáirséal
agus Dill £1.25

LEO DALY

READERS of the Irish language are well aware of the writings of Tomás Bairéad, and of the many honours, principally "The Irish Academy of Letters" award, "The Oireachtas" Prize, and "Duais an Chraobhin" Award, which were conferred on him. His position in Irish literature is unique because writing was his profession, and he served the news media as a journalist for more than thirty years. In 1948, when in charge of the Irish language page of the "Irish Independent", he resigned from the position, and returned to live quietly in his native Moycullen. It was not a sudden decision, it was something he had longed for and hoped for from the day he left — as he says himself of life in Dublin, "Bhualleadh uaigneas corruir ime agus mheadalodh rudal aithe ar an uaigneas sin again."

Gan Baisteadh might be classified as an autobiography, but as the author states, it is rather a series of impressions without continuity. Each of the thirty three chapters has a story to tell, and the progression is of time; but there is also the unmistakable development of the story of his journey through life.

It would be correct to say that the book is a valuable historical document, but it would be most unfair to evaluate Gan Baisteadh as only that. For the average reader, and here I include myself, the writer is at his best when he is eavesdropping rather than reporting. The strange mysterious sounds of the night watch; ghostly footsteps on the roadways and boreens, trespassing cattle in prized cabbage plots, a lone piper at a crossroads and the happy laughter of people; the beautiful chorus of winged birds singing praises as they await the rising sun; such moments are inspiring. Even in the growing city of Dublin the familiar sound of birds in flight transports the spirit to Corrib waters, but all this disappears when the grim reality of guns, spies, and secret burials trespasses; the sky darkens, voices speak in frightened whispers, and people rest uneasily behind

locked doors and darkened windows.

The trial of the unfortunate spy, the "Gauger", is related in matter-of-fact yet life or death terms of geography, race or culture because the Black and Tans assumed that Father Michael Griffith had rendered spiritual aid to the "Gauger" before his execution: that the priest became a marked man, and was later brutally murdered? Thomas Bairéad thinks so. And what of the strange title for the Civil War — Cogadh na gCarad. — the war of friends? When the cloud lifts again, the song rolls on with joy and humour, very earthy humour at times. Word play when introduced is very enjoyable. The humorous translation by Sean O'Neachtain, a Meath poet of the early 1700s of the name Feardorcha O'Dalsight, Man dark from two swans. The song of the woman coming from the well with her can of water — her two cans of water, as composed by Sean O'Burca.

Chonach tu an deatch
Agus chuala tu an gleo,
surely that should read, with all due respects to the author,
Chonach tu an deatch
Agus chonach tu an glow!
Athenry, before and during the Rising was, to Tomás Bairéad the cream of Connaught. This is a reversal of the age old saying, no doubt well known to the author, 'Athenry was, Galway is, and Aran will be' — or has something happened to change the course of history?

The penultimate chapter of the book, "Cathair gan corkscrew" is worthy of Joyce, or maybe more so, Beckett, in its conception of three 'after hour' strays with a precious cargo of beer in search of a corkscrew. The trio, Tomás Bairéad, Liam O'Flatharta and Mairtin O'Cadhain ponder on the missing corkscrew, and on the missing Galway author who would complete the quartet, Sean Phadraic O'Conaire. What one county in Ireland could supply four writers in Irish of this quality? Well, Liam O'Flatharta is a gambling man, and he knows that a Royal Flush beats any four — so maybe it's time for the survivors to deal the cards again. By the way — in ainm Dhe, what is the Irish for a Royal Flush?

Congratulations to Sáirséal agus Dill for a beautifully produced reasonably priced book, which also carries some very interesting photographs. In the length of this short review one can hardly do justice to the success achieved by both author and publisher.