



# **Chamber's Photograph Album Collection**

**GPC/9/6**

**Great Blasket File, [1961]**

Galway County Council Archives

Spoken at the Funeral of George Chambers  
by his son, Ivan

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After long labouring in the windy ways,  
On smooth and shining tides  
Swiftly the great ship glides,  
Her storms forgot, her weary watches past;  
Northward she glides, and through the enchanted haze  
Faint on the verge her far hope dawns at last.

The phantom sky-line of a shadowy down,  
Whose pale white cliffs below  
Through sunny mist aglow,  
Like noon-day ghosts of summer moonshine gleam -  
Soft as old sorrow, bright as old renown,  
There lies the home of all our mortal dream.

*friends*  
I will remember Canna  
Of the green meadows,  
And the myriad flowers,  
Of the frank and happy hours.

*tide*  
I will remember Canna  
Of the seals and the sea birds,  
Of the rocks and the washing waves,  
And the fire in the strange sea caves.

I will remember Canna,  
Of the sheep and the bracken,  
Of the lark and the cornrake,  
And I will remember - for your sake.

Some time before he died, my father contemplated his end with a characteristic detachment. In the manner of a business man bringing some affair to a proper conclusion, he indicated simply how he wished things to be managed, and he asked me if I would be willing to speak these valedictory phrases. In piety, I agreed, little realising at the time what a grievous burden it was to be.

George Chambers was a different man. By that I mean, as you here will understand, that he did not run with the herd. Some inherited strain, I judge, rather than the influence of education, produced in him an approach to all things that was decisively his own. He had very early found a way, a philosophy of life, which was in some ways spartan, without excluding pleasure. He did not wish to compromise with the second-rate, whether in the material, the social or the moral sphere. The writings of William Morris coloured much of his social thinking: rank meant nothing to him, the man was everything. I remember an occasion years ago when he brought in from the road an old tramp to share tea with a horrified and excited family.

He was blessed, as very few of us are blessed, with a natural curiosity about things, interesting things, over a wide range of subjects, and it was this curiosity which kept his mind alert to the end, and which shone like a flame through his life. This was not a

wayward or silly curiosity - silliness, in all its manifestations he could not tolerate - it was always relevant to something worth while. Only a few months ago he developed an urgent desire to know more about the daughters of King Canute, and letters went out as far as Denmark to satisfy this need. He had so many interests, so many enthusiasms, substantial, worthwhile enthusiasms that it is difficult to list or to isolate them, but we are all aware of his deep love for poetry, particularly spoken poetry. One of my earliest recollections of him is of my opening the door of a room to find him reading poetry aloud to himself. Then, he loved walking. All his life he has walked. He knew parts of the North Downs as he knew the Heath; and the South Downs were to him all that a man could desire. He loved the sea, and he was a man who loved islands. His visits to the Blaskets, for example, or to Muckle Flugga, or the Hebrides or the Irish Aran were an enrichment of experience not only for him but also for all of us who were fortunate enough to come within the spell of his enthusiasm. Places he loved he assimilated to himself to such effect that in telling of them he communicated something that we could know and understand and love. He loved this Suburb where our family has lived for 47 years, and perhaps I can suggest that he repaid this happiness in the Pageants he wrote - there were, I think, six of them - not one of which was without its moments of poetry and gaiety and humour and tenderness.

Childhood recollections of my father are all related to moments of pleasure: moving in golden sunlight through high corn, splendid walks with the family in country places, bathing on the Saxon shore; camping; kite flying. These things he did with us, very much a part of our small society. He was an ingenious man, delightful in unfolding mysteries. I think of his pride in his Orkney descent, of his interest in the Vikings, of his affection for his school, Ardingley, and of his love for the City of London, where he was apprenticed and of which city he was a Freeman. He liked apples, and honey in the comb. Us children he did not coerce into acceptable ways, but by his example he set us standards from which we should be loth to depart. He was very much the head of the family.

Our grief on this solemn occasion is tempered by the knowledge that my father had an unusually long, full and active life. His mind remained clear, and, what is more, receptive, to the end. The activities of his children and of his grandchildren, and news of one great grandchild, were a source of constant pleasure to him. I should perhaps say that one of the chief joys of his life has been his varied friendships, made not easily, maintained after testings. These friendships have coloured and influenced the pattern of our lives. He was, in general terms, never ill: he never knew the surgeon's knife. And for close on 60 years he had the support and companionship of my mother, whom now we shall doubly treasure. Surely here was a fortunate man. Yet it seemed that he was ever searching for new experiences, for a widening of his horizons. This was no fault. He had a certain restlessness, even in ripe old age which was conducive to his youthfulness of spirit. We may say of him, in Walter Pater's words, that he was always a seeker after something in the world that is there in no satisfying measure, or not at all.

So with love and thankfulness, and an infinite sadness, we take of him our last farewell.

General description of the Island-  
Distance from Dunquin Dingle and mainland

The Islandman.

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Galway County Council Archives

Went to the County Library  
to see the Searcher's Index  
by name, H.  
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to see the Searcher's Index  
my copy of the trip  
to the Seamus  
The Island 45

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Dunin

M E N    O N    I S L A N D S.

Can it be that never more  
Men will grow on Islands?

Ithaca and Eriskey,  
Iceland and Tahiti!

Must the engines he has forged  
Raven so for spaces,  
That the Islands dwindle down,  
Dwindle down! -

Pots that shelve the tap-root's  
growth?

Must it be that never more  
Men will flower on Islands?  
Crete and Corsica, Mitylene,  
Aran and Iona!

( Padraic Colum. )

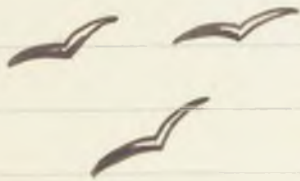
## THE SEAL.

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The little bay ringed round with broken cliffs  
Gathers the tide-borne wrack,  
And there the islanders come day by day  
For weed that shall enrich their barren fields.  
Here, since the cliff-path gaped,  
Cloven by the winter's wrecking storms,  
They had gathered to remake the shattered way.  
We idled as they laboured  
With listless, laughing talk of that and this,  
When suddenly a seal,  
Rising and falling on the changing tide,  
Lifted a dripping face and looked at us,  
A mournful face, more sad  
Than the grey sadness of a moonlit wave.  
We spoke, and in a moment it was gone,  
And an unpeopled sea  
Washed up and died in foam upon the shore.  
Said one: "He's lonely after his brother still."  
And so we heard the story,  
A mournful memory of the island, cherished  
By the old dreaming people,  
And told round the dim fire on winter nights.  
One twilight of late spring  
The men had killed a seal out on the beaches  
And brought it to a sea-cave for the skinning,  
And, as they worked red-handed,  
A voice out of the sea called "Brother!" once,  
And then "Brother!" again. Then silence, only  
A wind that sighed on the unquiet sea.  
So standing in the surf  
They saw as now a seal rising and falling  
On a slow swinging sea.  
They lifted their red hands and he was gone  
Silently slipping into a silent wave.

✓ SONG OF THE ISLAND GIRL ✓

O would I might keep  
 My father's kine,  
 Where the cliffs are steep,  
 Dear island mine. ~



Though scanty are fair  
 And poor our cot,  
 We were happy there  
 And sorrowed not. ~

This prison of trees  
 Is all you gave  
 For the open seas  
 And the crested wave. ~



O scent of sea-wrack  
 And keen salt spray,  
 How my heart goes back  
 The island way. ~

P O E T S.

She sat there, the strong woman,  
Dark, with swift eyes alert and laughter-lighted,  
And gathering that wild flock,  
This on her knee, that at her side, another  
Crouched hiding elfin-eyed under tossed hair;  
A calf, unsteady-footed  
And muzzled with a stocking, snuffed and blundered,  
And chickens hither and thither  
Pecked on the floor, fluttered on loft and settle.  
"Poets? And is it poets?"  
She said. "The day has been when there were poets  
Here on the Island, yonder on the mainland.  
And my own father's father  
Was the chief poet of the Island. Wisha!  
You'd go to the well up there to draw the water  
And talk a spell maybe, and come back to him  
And he'd have the poem for you, clean and clever.  
He had the wit. If only he'd had learning,  
Mother of God! 'tis he would have been a poet."

( Robin Flower. )



S O L I T U D E .

They could not stack the turf in that wet spring,  
And the cold nights were icy in our bones,  
And so we burned furze and the rusted bracken.  
I climbed the hill alone  
And by the old fort gathered in the sun  
Red fern and crackling furze;  
And, as I worked, a mist came from the sea  
And took the world away,  
And left me islanded in that high air,  
Where the trenched doon broods silent on the hill.  
I do not know what shapes were in the mist,  
But solitude was made more solitary  
By some re-risen memory of the earth  
That gathered round my loneliness,  
And threatened with the dead my living breath.  
I could have cried aloud for a sharp fear,  
But the mist thinned and withered, and the sun  
At one swift stride came through.  
They passed, those shadowy threats,  
And the great company of Ireland's hills,  
Brandon and Slemish and the lesser brethren,  
Stood up in the bright air,  
And, on the other side the sea,  
The illimitable Atlantic, rolled and shone.

( Robin Flower. )

I loitered there, and he  
Built up the turf-rick with how careful hands,  
Hands that had built a thousand ricks and now  
Worked delicately with a deft unconsciousness.  
Below us the Great Island  
Fell with white-shining grasses to the cliffs,  
And there plunged suddenly  
Down sheer rock-gullies to the muttering waves.  
Far out in the bay the gannets  
Stopped and turned over and shot arrowy down,  
And, beyond island, bay and gannets falling,  
Ireland, a naked rock-wave, rose and fell.  
He had lived on the Island sixty years  
And those years and the Island lived in him,  
Graved on his flesh, in his eye dwelling,  
And moulding all his speech,  
That speech witty and beautiful  
And charged with the memory of so many dead.  
Lighting his pipe he turned,  
Looked at the bay and bent to me and said:  
"If you went all the coasts of Ireland round,  
It would go hard to you to find  
Anything else so beautiful anywhere;  
And often I am lonely,  
Looking at the Island and the gannets falling  
And to hear the sea-tide lonely in the caves.  
But sure 'tis an odd heart that is never lonely."

THE STRANGER'S GRAVE.

(In a graveyard upon Inishmain (likewise on the Great Blasket), dedicated to unbaptized babies, an unknown drowned man lies buried.)

Little feet too young and soft to walk,  
Little lips too young and pure to talk,  
Little faded grass-tufts, root and stalk.

I lie alone here, utterly alone,  
Amid pure ashes my wild ashes mingle;  
A drowned man, without a name, unknown,  
A drifting waif, flung by the drifting shingle.  
Oh, plotting brain, and restless heart of mine,  
What strange fate brought you to so strange a shrine?

Sometimes a woman comes across the grass,  
Bare-footed, with pit-patterings scarcely heard,  
Sometimes the grazing cattle slowly pass,  
Or on my turf sings loud some mating bird.  
Oh, plotting brain, and restless heart of mine,  
What strange fate brought you to so strange a shrine?

Little feet too young and soft to walk,  
Little lips too young and pure to talk,  
Little faded grass-tufts, root and stalk.

( Emily Lawless. )

## A F O R E W O R D.

The Letters that follow were written by Eilish, an Irish peasant girl who was born and lived, up to the time of these letters, on the Island of the Great Blasket.

The island lies about three miles off the Kerry coast and is the most westerly inhabited spot (with the exception of light-houses) in the Old World., its next parish is America and its nearest point on the mainland is the tiny village of Dunquin, from there it is about twelve miles by land to the quite considerable town and port of Dingle. Generally referred to in the letters as "town."

The Island is little more than three miles long and rather less than a mile wide. At the side facing the mainland a great slice seems to have been carved out and it is here that the village snuggles down under the protection of the great hill. There are no other dwellings away from the village.

Scattered around the main island there are five smaller island, but, with the exception of a lighthouse, they are no longer inhabited. Apart from the rather larger cabin that served for school, there was neither post-office, church, shop, or inn on the island, nor was there a Civic Guard, priest, doctor or mid-wife; there were only two people with any kind of official position, the school-mistress and the post-man and the latter's sole job was to fetch letters and parcels from Dunquin and take postal matter back from the island to Dunquin, as he was the only person in constant touch with the outside world, his job, in the eyes of the islanders, was so important that he was known as "The King."

At the time of my first visit to the island, in 1931, there were

35 children attending the school and the total population was about 120. To-day there is no school and the population has dwindled to about 30, mostly old people.

No one on the island owned a gramophone or a wireless set so that the islanders had to depend entirely on themselves for amusements. So with the exception of groceries and certain articles of clothing and some household utensils, the island was self-contained.

Canoes were the only boats used, these were made of a framework of lath over which tarred canvas was stretched; this sounds very fragile but in fact they were remarkably seaworthy and could go out in weather that would have swamped a timber-built boat.

To say, in the comparative sense in which we now use the word, that the islanders were poverty-stricken, would be an understatement, hardly a woman on the island was wearing clothes that had been bought by the wearer, practically everything they wore, and what some of the men wore, too, had come from friends and relations in America and England, and the islanders depended very largely on remittances from relations to purchase the bare necessities of life.

It has been said by a great Irish Scholar that this little community was the last vestige of the old civilization or culture and it might well be so. The only language spoken was Irish and it was considered the purest in the Free State.

It must be borne in mind that Eilish, in writing these letters, is using an acquired language.

For convenience the letters have been re-arranged so that each aspect of island life should come together and make a distinctive narrative; but each is in its proper order of time and in no case has the actual wording, or even spelling, been altered. They are not

in any sense, a day by day diary of events, indeed sometimes there was quite a long break between one letter and another.

It is curious, and interesting, to note how Eilish emphasises the happiness of the Islanders, living, as one sees it, in a constant struggle against poverty and the forces of nature.

And one last word; I met Eilish for the first time on a wet and windy day on the slope of the great hill above the village when she and her sister were bringing home their ass with a load of turf. Both of the girls were bare-headed and bare-footed and their hair a tangled mop and I thought that Eilish was one of the most beautiful girls that I had ever seen. The two of them were as merry and unaffected as a couple of small children out for a holiday.

## BLAHEEN LAID LOW

It was a cause of grief to the people of the Great Blasket to learn of the death of our excellent noble friend. There is no herb or remedy against death, and it is a thing that is before every man whatever his ability and his calling in life. I am one of the people who had to do with Bláheén during his stays on the Blasket and it is my opinion that he deserves to get a small account from me of his comings and goings on the Blasket.

Tomas O'Crohan (or better say "The Islandman") was my father and I am Seán the son, and there is a great difference between the two of us as regards handling a pen to write an article on Bláheén, ~~but~~ nevertheless it is difficult to get the exact truth in mortal matters.

It is more than twenty years since Bláheén first set foot on the ground of this Island. A fine fellow, broad and strong, and a big head on him, about six feet tall and round about fourteen stone weight. There is no one of us on the Blasket that hadn't something to say about the fine vigorous head he had on him. It was an unusual head. It is my opinion that he had the knowledge of many things that the generality of men didn't have. When I write 'generality' it is men of learning I am speaking of.

It was in my house that Bláheén would spend the greater part of the day, himself and my father talking endlessly about the ways of the world. Every word that fell from my father Bláheén would write it down exactly and perfectly, a word that Tomas hadn't the meaning of Bláheén would not accept. Every year that Bláheén came it was Tomas was his professor and his house the college. There's no putting down anything with pen or ink but Bláheén and Tomas had it transcribed. As far as my opinion goes, there is some big book that he has made which he himself called "The Great Blasket", a page of Irish and English on the other side, but I have no information that it was printed yet. I doubt greatly some part of it is in print.

He quickly fell in with the people of the Island. He accepted their ways and the manner in which they put the day past them. He threw off his gentleman's clothes and put on a jersey and old trousers and hob-nailed boots with the boys of the village and away with him into every place along with them. It's often he was on the back of a donkey fetching turf from the hill or sea-weed from the strand or digging his share.

The Islanders were very fond of him and their hearts were set on pleasing him and if he had called them to arms they would n't have failed him.

He would bring with him every year all kinds of things, whiskey, tobacco, cigarettes, old clothes, old shoes, and many things useful to the housewife, and whoever didn't have his head above water as to money there was no fear he would n't set him humming "Donal of the Sun!"

He concealed nothing from the Islanders. He was big-hearted, generous, hospitable, with no miserliness about him. He distributed a hundred pounds every year to the people of the Island. He put the Blasket first and whatever the Blasket writers have done it is Bláheén that is praised for it.

He would cause much fun and laughter among the old people when they had asked him for a drop of whiskey and they were drinking it.

Four of them and they dancing a four-handed reel, and if they didn't set up a clattering on the floor its not day till morning. He would bring his wife and children with him every year, and the children had neat Irish and were full of sport and frolic. Bláheén didn't leave any place round the Blasket without walking to it and writing about it. He said himself that he had a good donkey's load of writings about the Island. When the people of the Island were talking and chattering away there wouldn't be a squeak out of Bláheén, but he would be listening sharply and attentively.

He had a great respect for my father. The amount that he had written in the course of the day he would bring to him in the evening to correct.

When Carl Marstrander, or the Norseman as he was called, was coming to Blasket, Bláheén had no acquaintance with the Island at the time; but when Marstrander asked Bláheén what place was the best for getting Irish, he said <sup>that</sup> the Great Blasket in the West of Ireland was the only place in Ireland where there was no English encroaching. Bláheén himself was never in the Island before that but he had heard talk of it.

The Norseman came, and he got the language from Tomas son of Donald and told the story to Bláheén who was a young man in the Museum at that time. It was he who sent Bláheén to the Blasket for the first time. I do not know if the Norseman is alive or dead, but if ever any man had Irish he had it, alive and vigorous. The Blasket has fallen off much since Marsander and Bláheén set foot on it the first day ever. Its going downhill almost every day. There were thirty houses on it at that time and fifty children on the register of the school. To-day it is without a school, without a child, and there are only seven houses in it. The young people crossed over to the other side (of the Atlantic) and the old people moved over to the mainland, for the life of the Blasket was too hard for them. It is over with Bláheén and Tomas. They will never be on the Blasket again and I that saw them once, the two of them together, and many other people along with them, it sets me remembering, and what I take for myself from this is that the world is not worth living in. They say its a poor thing the world and a man's friends.

Its a long story about Bláheén and his visits to the Blasket. I wanted to write an article after his death and to tell the world that it makes us sorrowful and broken-hearted to hear of his death.himself and

Pray for Tomas and all those who have gone to a better world in the Island of Paradise.

(16.6.46) I don't hear any word from Mrs Flower these days or Barbara. I don't know will Bláheén's ashes come or not, of course we'll hear if it comes all right.

(18.9.46) I got a letter from Barbara that she was coming to Dunquin and that she intended coming to us on Monday and told me to write a note to Dunquin to her if I was suitable for that day. So I wrote explaining that the day would be all right. She came and a lovely boy with her. Seán is thinking going in with her tomorrow.

(13.10.46) Well about Barbara. She and her friend came to us as



she promised us in her letter, so we were ready for them and I may say I enjoyed their trip, and Barbara seemed lovely and sensible just a real lady to me a very clever educated lady, God bless her, and we talked and talked and talked about you too. So everything was settled that Seán too would go in with her to spread her father's ashes. So the weather was terrible a few days afterwards and this same evening Seán got a lift in the motor-car going to Dunquin, the schoolteacher and his wife were in it, and what do you think that happened a bit of the way that he had to take in his sister-in-law and another teacher from Ballyferriter, so Seán came out of the motor-car a very long way to Ballyferriter and walked it all the way to Dunquin and at the same time, wasn't Barbara half way in to the Island before him. The wireless telephone to the Island was broken, as it is often and he stayed a night in Dunquin until tomorrow morning. The phone was all right then and he phoned in and told my brothers to come out for him but the day began pouring rain and wind began to blow and no one came out nor either go in, so my dear poor man tramped all the way back home late in the evening, misty and uncomfortable, but it was a journey for Bláheén's sake though dead and gone and also for Barbara which came so far and got through so much a trouble but she is a very brave girl and good health and luck to her, she won and succeeded in doing what her father wished for at his death bed. I was so sorry he could not go in so was he himself but he was glad that Barbara got in and was through with her job which meant so much to us that was dear to him.

#### A LETTER FROM BARBARA FLOWER TO HER MOTHER.

The day we took the ashes up to the Dun was very wet and wild and misty, it was last Thursday, after lunch. J took the urn in his rucksack and the Guiheen family came with us, Mary, Seán, and Mike, who happened to be on leave from the Guards, and two other boys and two girls. We went along the north side of the Island and when we got to the Dun Mike took ~~the~~ ~~my~~ my arm and we clambered down into the Garden of the Dun with the wind whistling in our ears and nearly blowing us over. I told them to stand back and then I scattered the ashes. Then I took the copper urn and flung it over the cliff into the sea. I thought if I left it they would make an idol of it. Then we climbed up onto the path again, and Mike nobly offered me a cigarette, I suppose he thought I was overcome, but I can't say I felt anything but relieved that I hadn't fallen over the cliff, it was so wild. But I didn't refuse the cigarette, I never do. When we got back old Mary came out and told me she said three prayers as we left the house. They all said "Tá sé sasta anois" (He's satisfied now.) They are quite Pagan. When old Mary saw the urn she said "The poor man, he's in there." They felt it was the last night they could give him hospitality. They have his photograph, sitting on the settle, framed up on the wall, among all the virgins and Sacred Hearts, and they say it will be there as long as the house stands. It is very sad to see the house of the King in ruins, the wind took the roof off last winter and only the room you had survives. They keep a fire in it and some of them sleep there in the summer. All of them who can read have read "The Western Island" and seem to love it. Old Father Moriarty, the priest at Ballyferriter, told

me it was not prose at all but poetry, and that Daddy saw the poetic side of the Islanders. I gathered that he was well acquainted with the non-poetic side as well. He was sorry he didn't know him.

Peg is also in Dunquin with Cuddy and the file. She looks like an old witch. I found her outside her house and went up and ~~said~~ said "Peg, I'm Bláheén's daughter" and she flung her arms ~~around~~ around me and wept and dragged me into the house with J looking slightly taken aback, and then they did a sort of lament, each saying something in turn. I couldn't understand much; it was a bit like Aeschylus, and a bit like the preface to "The Western Island," and J said he was struck by the weird pattern of it, each person chiming in like a Greek Chorus when they split up, and we were all pretty well in tears at the end.

THE DEATH OF BLÁHEÉN (From the Irish of Seán Ó Riogh)  
The Western Island Speaks:

You came my way with love for me, Bláheén, you came to me with  
love long ago in the days of your youth,  
You gave me your heart and I gave you mine, and you asked  
instruction of my mouths.  
I told you my tale and you listened to me in laughter and in  
sorrowful lamentation;  
I revealed to you many of my secrets and I told you much of  
my counsel.  
But I did not reveal all my secrets, I kept hidden from you  
the greatest of them all,  
For I saw that you were not yet ready to understand it had I  
revealed it.  
Alas, now you are laid low by Death, for it is strong Death  
is and powerful;  
But powerful as Death is, it was not in his power to sunder  
you from your love of me.  
You have bequeathed to me a pledge of love, a pledge of your  
broken-hearted love, for a memorial and a token:  
A handful of ashes in an urn, the ashes of your noble body,  
that is the pledge of love you have left me, a pledge  
bitter and sorrowful.  
You will come here one day, you will go up the hill in the  
morning or in the evening  
To the lonely peak where you used to walk long ago, looking  
out on the far and the middle distance  
Towards the Skelligs to the South and Limerick Head to the  
North and the high mountains to the East and the  
countless wonders of the ocean:  
And they will scatter your ashes in that place, Bláheén, they  
will spread your scorched ashes on my poor earth.  
And the sea will moan and the wind will roar and the sea-birds  
will scream and I myself will let out a long sob of  
sorrow,  
And the night will fall and quiet will come in the WESTERN  
ISLAND, and grief will make the tears fall,  
And they will say that this is the end of the tale of love  
between Bláheén and the WESTERN ISLAND, with the ashes  
of Bláheén winnowed by the breeze.

But in the darkness of the night, when heavy slumber is on the sea and on the wind and on the birds and on every person and pilgrim,  
It is then I will reveal the secret I kept hidden from you, it is then I will put it powerfully into effect.  
I will reveal it strongly and generously, the secret of my intercession and my entreaty, the secret of my faith and my love and my hope.  
I will send out a summons to all Ireland. I will convene an assembly of all the saints of Ireland from the eldest to the youngest.  
And we will all pray together to God to deliver you from the grip of Death and guide you into the Kingdom of Heaven where the saints of God are.  
I pray to God on your behalf, Bláheén, I bow my knee in the presence of the Trinity.  
Hear me O God, mercifully hear my supplication and my cry for my bright Bláheén.  
Let the Light of Heaven come to my bright love that brought me the crown of affection and honour;  
May my Bláheén be in the Island of Paradise and flower there without danger of fading.

(15.7.47) The day before your letter arrived I was talking to a very nice friends about you, it was Barbara Flower and her brother Pat. We were overjoyed to give us the honour of visiting us, but the time was so short. They had got the loan of two bicycles for just to make the trip to Murreagh and they went into my aunt's first and had tea there so I beleive they hardly spent ten minutes with us but oh we had enjoyed them. They were lovely and Pat surprised us of being so tall and manly after these years and looked a picture of health and beauty. Seán would love to spend more time talking to him and found him very interesting indeed. So we had to be satisfied they couldn't delay this time, but Pat said next year he would bring his wife and little son. I was glad to hear their mother was well and Barbara said they hadn't heard of you for a spell now. They were after spending two days on my native Island and Pat was astonished at the change there since his last visit 20 years ago, he remembered the place even then.

## Bás an Bhlaithín

(I ndil-chuimhne ar Robin Flower, d'eag Eanáir, 1946)

An t-Oileán Tiar a labhrann:

Thangais im' threo le grádh dhom, a Bhlaithín, thangais chugham le  
grádh fado riamh i laetheanta d'óige;  
Leigis do chroidhe liom is le geas mo chroidhe leat-sa agus d'iarrais  
orm tuairisc ó'm beolaibh.  
D'innseas duit mo sceal agus d'eistis liom le gaire agus le bron-ghol;  
Nochtas duit a lan dem' runa agus dubhart leat a lan dem' chomhairle.  
Acht níor nochtas duit iomlan mo run, do ceilleas ort an run bo mhó aca  
Mar chonnac nar rabhais ullamh fos chun é a thuisgint da nochtachainn  
e.  
Och, anois taoi an lar ag an mbás, mar is laddir é an bás agus is  
comhachtach;  
Acht da chomhachtaighe é an bás, ní raibh 'na chumas tu a scaramhaint  
od' ghrádh domsa.  
D'fhagais le h-udhacht agam deimhin ghrádh, deimhin mhachailleach ar  
do ghrádh croidhe-bhriste, mar chuimhne agus mar  
chomhartha:  
Dorn luaithe i gcorn, luaith do chuirp uasail fein, sin i an deimhin  
ghrádh d'fhagais agam, deimhin chraicthe, deimhin bhronach  
Tiocfar annso la eigin, geobhfar suas an Cnoc ar maidin no am  
thrahnóna  
Go dtí an t-árdán uaigneach 'nar ghnath leat siubhal fado, ag feachaint  
uait i gcein agus i gcomhgar  
Ar na Scealga odheas, ar Cheann Leime ó thuaidh, ar na sleibhte árd  
soiris ariongantaisina h-xaigeine gan chomhaireamh,  
Agus scaipfear do luaith'san áit sin, a Bhlaithín, leathfear ar mochre  
bhocht do luaith dhoighte.  
Agus beicfidhan fhairrge agus géimfidh an ghaoith agus screadfaidh na  
h-eanlaithe mara agus leigfead fein uaim osna fada dobronach,  
Agus tuitfidh an oidhche agus tiocfaidh ciuineas 'san Oileán Tiar agus  
le neart achtuirseilfear na deora,  
Agus dearfar gurb é sin críoch eachtra ghrádh an Bhlaithín agus an  
Oileáin Tiar, luaith an Bhlaithín 'a cáitheadh ag an  
bhfeoithe .  
Acht i ndorchadas na h-oidhche, nuair a bheidh trom-shuan ar an  
bhairrge ar na ngaoith ar na h-eanlaithe ar gach duine  
deoraidhe,  
Is annsan a nochtfaid an run do xxi cheilleas riamh ort, is annsan a  
chuirfaid bhfeidhm é go comhachtach;  
Nochtfaid e go fuinneamhail fial, run mo ghuidheachtana 7 mathchuingh  
run mo chreidimh 7 mo ghrádh 7 mo dhoichais!  
Cuirfead gairm scoile amch ar Eiriann go léir, comorfad comhdhail  
naomh Eireann go léir o pna sinnsear síos go dtí n-a soisear,  
Agus iarrfaimid go léir le cheile ar Dhia thu d-fhuascailt o ghreim an  
bhais agus tu a threorghadh isteach i Rioghacht Neimhe mar a bhail  
naoimh De 'n-a sloighte.

Guidhim Dia ar do shon, a Bhlaithin, feacaim mo ghlun ar do shon i  
láthair na Tríonoide.  
Eist liom, a Dhia, eist ~~liom~~ <sup>lem</sup> impidhe ar son mo Bhlaithin ghil agus  
lem' eigeamh go trocaireach.  
Solas na bFlaitheas go raibh ag mo ghrádh geal do thug dom barr geana  
agus onóra:  
I n-Oilean Parrthais go raibh mo Bhlaithin is go mbláthaidh ann gan  
baoghal a fheochta.

Sean O Rioghbhardain, C.S.S.R.

From Irisleabhar ~~M~~ Muighe Nuadhat (1946)

Galway County Council Archives

## FISHING & FARMING

29.9.38. The lobster season is at end with the last two weeks which Islanders are lonely after as always, as there is always x something to hand when at sea so when weather breaks this time of the year there isn't much chance of settling it again and just throw Islanders out of their job and their support of life. The last trip of the "Frenchman" always leaves a sad-eyed look on Island-fishermen. They are always lonely to part with him, they follow him by land until the ship is out of sight waving and cheering. The fine weather goes with him. Also their only means of living, no wonder then they miss him as fishermen always miss the sea.

5.4.39. The potatoes are set and manuring has commenced these days, also cutting turf, others making pots, others mending up ~~the~~ their old canoes for the coming season. People also are in the strand carrying in weed and in the fields yesterday and to-day.

10.9.39. A week ago the "Frenchman" visited this place and told the Islanders that the war was on btween Poland and Germany, so he was not sure he may be able to come again. Then the weather also is broken so Islanders brought their old pots and ropes into land yesterday evening. ~~Paddy Daly is still on Antiswickleene fishing.~~

20.10.39. So far the weather is heavenly fine and the potato crop are a bumper this year and its stored in with a week without any drop of rain falling on it, fish is salted, plenty of macreal only brought 2/- for a hundred in town. Fishermen here don't mind fishing it now as it cost nothing.

22.10.39. To-day in Dunquin  $\frac{1}{2}$  sack of flour is 25/-, indeed its

no joke putting that amount together once a week or 10 days for some Islanders. Of course we are ready to be in trouble for a while if that ends the greatest trouble like any war country.

3.2.40. Few families of some sheep I may say four families in the Island and indeed they'll have to be after them night and day on the hill to look after them and when it comes to sheering time ~~kk~~ that one man in an Island would not do the job so the one man will not have them but the 3 or 4 houses that has the boys' help for sheep here hardly can keep them and before a £1 is made of a sheep here I always call it a blood pound. It often shows blood with hardship and swet..

6.5.40. A letter came from Peter Trellivn Paimpool, France, these days, but it is not quite sure of his coming yet, some time in July maybe, he says he will write again so that is rather late in the year and fishermen are still worrying.

10.5.40. You may be sure that the Island is very much affected by the black cloud, I should say it is terrible this Summer season and it is in no happiness at all. Now when the Island should be in bloom as with many years there is no life at all in it. How would be? Only one canoe out fishing - there is a blight on lobster fishing the season with no hope of the rescuer, the poor man, maybe he is dead one of these fine days. Indeed I may tell you ~~kk~~ that shillings are far and scarce at present, when young and old used have enough.

Flour now in Dunquin,  $\frac{1}{2}$  sack 30/-, tobacco 2/- per plug, 2 lbs butter 3/-

29.6.40. Only the one visitor has come to the Island yet, its a hopeless, fruitless year, everyone thinks so, even the weather is

miserable. Fishermen are doomed by Sky and Sea so far, only two canoes are out and a terrible storm has come to blight every growth in their bloom. Its in the air that every living thing or person must suffer more or less.

24.7.40 (On returning from a visit to Mary) In the following morning we were lucky, for all the poor fishermen were out with their lobsters. My father and Seánin and Mike were in a canoe. They had a few doz of lobsters and I may say they earned their money for them before they had put them into a motor-lorry above on the top of Faillemore. A Dingle lobster buyer was there and gave them 8/- a doz for them. The buyer from Cahirciveen would not come for lobsters unless 50 doz were there, so as the weather is terrible broken this year lobsters are scarce.

8.10.40. The weather has turned out colder and darker, few fishermen go out fishing these nights. It only costs 2/- a hundred (mackeral) but they are glad to get enough to salt it. Salt cost 8/- cwt.

A poor crew of three lost their lives around where Nora is. They put too much weight or I may say they had too many fish and they were taking in the nets and fish until all were in and then the canoe sank. Lord save us and guard us. Even here fishermen stayed in from fishing some nights after hearing of them. I met one of this crew when I was out with Mary. They were the best three men around the place in every way and had great experience at sea. May the Lord have mercy on their souls.

30.10.40. Life is getting dull and dreary around the Island already and the sea is showing herself off as it is her nature from this on. We got a few weeks of the most beautiful weather not



long ago and the good news came in that mackrels cost £1 per hundred, so I am sure you would enjoy the unusual sight of fishermen going out fishing mackrels at 10 o'clock in the morning until 4 in the evening, it was showels of fish that used run in and out and when it used come near the land, fishermen surrounded it with nets and indeed they did not catch much of it by day, but when mackrel fishing is seen like this during the day there is not any chance at all of seeing it at night, so they had to be satisfied with this small share. 4 canoes were out a whole week day and night and the best one did not make £4 each man. It is never caught when it is worth getting. Before the price ran so high it was very plentiful and all the Islanders have enough salted of it. Also they have good potatoes this year thank God for that. From this on indeed very seldom any fish is caught unless near Christmas when the weather calms down again. So you can understand that the poor man also is at war with the world and in such cases is worn and tired and discontented.

6.3.41. You may be sure that everything is dear now anything to put in your mouth cost money and more money every day. I'll tell you. Flour £1.11.6 a half sack. Jam 2/- a crock before 1/3. Marg 1/- and -/8 lb. Onions 5d a lb. Tobacco 1/9 a plug that is 10½ per ounce. Tea 3/- a lb, sugar 5d per lb. Clothes and knitting threds are treable their usual price. You may be sure that when a poor man goes out for some groceries and a half sack of Flour his £2 will not bring him much after the flour.

13.4.41. Fish costs a very high price, maskrels cost £2 and more per 120 only 3 canoes are in and out every night with the

last two months and indeed it is not worth while. Mackrels are very scarce on the Island coast, it is terrible for the Islanders when prices are so high and fishermen are doing loads of money on the mainland coasts around and when at other times when prices are not worth mentioning, fish coming inland every night. So the fishermen here must have great patience.

30.6.41. The weather indeed is not favourable for the Islanders this Summer its very foggy and dark and then mackrel fishing is avoided and without mackrel the spiller fishing is avoid, two canoes made fairly good at the spiller. You would have to have two crews ~~for~~ for this, one crew fishing for the bait at night and the others out all day spiller fishing. Then I am sure it is bought cheap in town, one canoe 3 men crew had £10 worth one day, that was a good catch ~~for~~ for day and a night.

22.8.41. 5 canoes came home yesterday evening, they brought a couple of stones of flour from town which is very scarce at present also is petrol or gas and tobacco and tea. Flour now costs £1.13.0 per 10 stone. Tobacco 2/6 a plug, Tea 4/- a lb cheapest, meat very dear altogether and all these very scarce at present.

2.10.41. Great hardship has been on Islanders with the last 3 or 4 months no flour comes to Dunquin for them as it used to therefore they have to travel to town once a week, them with large families and bring few stones flour by some means home for the morning meals anyway.

Half sack flour now costs £2 - two pounds and very scarce to get only in stones we get the flour in town. It is said that it will be very plentiful next month, I can't say will it be or not. Of course Islanders must pay more and more when the call to town for 3 or 4

stone of flour and pay for something to bring it up to Dunquin to stay sometimes 2 nights in town waiting for the flour to come in, also tobacco is very very scarce and candles or anything for a light. So if you have a war you get what you want and all men has war some way or other even poor Islanders. They eat potatoes twice now certainly.

25.11.41. Somebody from Leeds wrote to the postmaster not long ago that he would come to buy lobsters and crabs this summer and would put a pond there if the fishermen would be satisfied. Indeed they would be quite willing and told him so. I am sure he will write again before long.

4.4.42. Yesterday Good Friday Niam and I visited the Gravel Strand as it is an old custom here to bring home something to eat from this strand this Holy Day, also John was there picking perawinkles or in Irish "Baikneac." He had a  $\frac{1}{2}$  gallon tin full. I counted 30 people there men almost all 5 or 6 girls. The men were going out to the very end out cutting sea-weed and carrying in small amount ropes in through the large stones. Indeed it was a great task, and taking them up to the field where the ass can come for it. Before it was spread on their fields ready in the late cold and raining evening you may be sure they had done a good day's work. They haven't any good hopes of good potatoes this year without guano which is very very scarce, they will be very wet but anyway they are making the best of what they have like always and hope God to help them for the rest. You may be sure that poor Islanders work for their meals and to tell the truth has a very poor meal after the day and is too far from some good food or a good drink to take after their hardworking day.

They were all very wet in the strand that day.

14.5.42. Now they have the potatoes manured with mussels and manure, they are working hard saving turf, so few Islanders last week brought out their tramels with them and had a nice catching of connor-fish and pollock.

18.4.43. To-day is Palm Sunday I was at Mass myself as the weather is rather cold yet and I didn't bring Niam atall and Seán was rather tired to get up as it was early Mass and yesterday he was cutting turf with two more with him, that's the custom here, then he'll go with them cutting it next week. They brought with them a half gallon can sugar tea butter and plenty bread and made tea at the bog and was home at 9 o'clock last night, they'll have another day next week for to have enough cut. They now and then when weather permits go out fishing as they have to go out miles and miles this ~~weaker~~ time of the year, they only try their luck a very fine night and not many is to be got until the Autumn season. Its very dear now and one hundred is better or is as well as 4 or 5 hundreds that time when it is so plentiful. The price is over a pound a hd at present. Then when lots of canoes are out some get a good catch and more ~~canes~~ in without none this time its hard to catch.

18.4.43  
Down on the strand this evening men and boys <sup>with pikes</sup> were out to their knees in the sea reaching sea-weed, They are all day and night like this as its the only other manure they have this year.

20.5.43 Cutting turf and in the fields you would find all men and boys these days. The fishing isn't much its very very scarce this time of the year and they would have to spend all night out and then to sleep in the day time. Then when there isn't fish to be got, there are more work to be done and wasting time at sea is no joke it won't be much now on

until Aug. I am sure unless spillar-fishing, then the price will not be as high as at present.

14.7.43. They (the men) spent a good week at sea spillar-fishing during the day and at early mornings all through ~~this~~ <sup>the</sup> week and you may be sure that nowadays they pray for another fine week. It has just turned out Winter again all of a sudden, high wind and rain all day and night, potatoes are blighted and people are afraid of the year and the new turf are far from being dry.

weather is terrible rain nearly every day from dawn to dark and high winds and snow, such a cold weather I never did see, its worse than any Winter known, very very seldom a fine day comes and you understand how does effect the fishing season. If it was very fine they would do very good I mean this time of the year they have to go out a very long spell at sea the mackerels were nearer before, but anyway we shall not complain we have enough to eat and drink so far and have the joy of a perfect peace here in Ireland. Thank God for His goodness.

3.4.44. March was very fine and dry not a sign of rain during March and they used be out fishing but mackrael was very scarce, hardly they got late for the spillers and their fish are very dear indeed and them fish are rare here too. They used be more plentiful round the Island. Its a hard work though to go out for the bate and then to bate the spillier again and leave the house at 5 o'clock a.m. and out until ten o'clock and by the time you are home its about e and to leave again at 5 p.m. for to kill bate. They are like that for a week some time if the weather permits, sure when you are not out fishing here you will never have any other chance of earning a pound the likes of us you see, and you may be sure its easy to spend ~~ix~~ one these days. So long as people has their health they are all right when you are without it <sup>nothing else matters.</sup>

1.6.44. We got a most wonderful week of real summer and lots of dry weather so that people were praying for rain so the rain came and now they wish it would stop again and have their nice weather back.

THE POSTMAN

26.11.38. There is some talk of sending a Wireless to this Island for to send out news. I don't know will it come true or not. Anyway that was a very good idea.

25.12.40. Last week an official notice came to all Islanders for to send in their application for a post in the Island. Nobody knows what Post it is unless it is the telephone to communicate them with the Island as it was said one should have a good house. It is also rumoured that a Post-office will come with this. Anyone that will get these will have a nice job, whoever will be the lucky winner.

17.1.41. I have not applied for the post Mistress job but my husband has done so, if ever he gets it of course I will do my part in the job for I am well able to do so thank God for that.

It is ready to come to the Island the Wireless-Telephone and when they will have chosen the candidate for the post-office and when the fine weather comes this offer will come to the Island. This information came in a letter from Dublin into this house yesterday also. When you'll receive this note please get your paper and type down a good letter praising our house and my husband and I for this post-office and wireless and write to Dublin to Minister of Post and Telegraph Dublin, and then the other one to P. Walshe, the Postmaster General, Tralee. I am writing you a sample copy of what you will write, of course I know you are well and able to do this million times far better and will think of better sentences. Note that letters like these are wanted and that they count greatly for this job and if you know other important persons who know about us make them write for us also:-

"So many years since you came to the Island, that the school-teacher the N O'Shea now Mrs Healy acquainted you with this family O'Crohans. You knew Tomás well. Then his son and his wife... That this was the house for far and near and visitors during the day and night time reading Irish and English where so many books were to be found and where the visitors were heartily welcomed any time at all and get what they desired there - so many praises that this was the perfect house for this post-office and that nobody would be surprised. The youngest family married, although had great fame name that this would not do for them as they were depending on 6/- dole money. That the post-man and his family had a good job before an and out with the mail bag, that another Gruheen family had a hosiery factory, and that this married man was the one person who knew how to run a post-office on the Island, that he was noted for his understanding in any business that would come across in Irish or English and so on. Say that this is the house that brought the many thousand visitors to the Island that taught Irish to Robin Flower and so many Irish Scholars and brought the Island to whom does know it. Say it was the book the "Islandman" that brought yourself to so far away Island, and that the post-office and Wireless will be very welcome here."

I am in a great hurry with this letter as I know dear friend you will understand what this job would mean to us £40 a year. No other married man has applied for this but John my husband. Be sure and write two letters and tell them the truth.

6.2.41. Thank you ever so much for your interesting letters, they were splendid and also charming to read and when I heard such praises of me I read them again and again. I hope they'll play so

such charm on those whom they were written to and that they'll send you on the best hopes and wishes.

7.2.41. We did not hear any further news of the telephone or Post-office but I am sure they are determined to come to the Island when the weather gets fine and I am sure they know now whom they'll to and give the post, whether they'll give it to us or now, no blame will be going to you if it is not to us they'll come, but I hope my husband will get it as he is the only one for it who can understand it or do it perfectly well. Everyone's "form" was returned to them to complete rightly but John's one. He had it filled to their satisfaction. From Tralee these forms came. Would not that give them a hint that he understood better than the others.

6.3.41. Yesterday a motor boat came to the Island bringing P. Walshe, Postmaster, Tralee, but we were all dissappointed to see that he brought again two engineers to the Postoffice House Islanders think it likely to be put there and we Islanders are sad and angry surely it must be a false Government altogether to be doing this. I don't exactly know yet if its true.

The Postmaster visited every candidate and put 2 or 3 questions on them. He was in here. He put a few questions on John, about England etc. He asked myself a few questions in English. Surely he had a good reason to visit every candidate, I suppose.

We have also written a good letter to someone in Dublin and told all about this Radio and that if they were to put it into the postman's house, that the Islanders would think the Government mad indeed.

22.3.41. It is reported that the wireless Radio is coming to the Island next week and we are all excited about it as no one is sure



of where it is coming to, anyway if it comes I will let you know about it the evening it will arrive. They have the one in Dunquin's post-office these days, I mean they have put in a Radio wireless there. Yes the red-headed Miss Daly is still at the Post-office in Dunquin.

18.4.41. The Post-office and Radio has not come yet and no one has got any promise of them so far. They will have the long Summer days soon I am sure that's what is keeping them away.

30.6.41. There are so much to be told since then that I don't really know where to commence. First of all the Post-office and Wireless they came at the end of May I should say. They came to the Postman's house which everyone expected as his son was appointed 4 or 5 weeks before and he had to go to town and bring some timber and settle a place or an office for himself in the house, then a Noble came with the poles and wireless and such instruments and engineers coming and going for a whole week such traffic you would think there were two schools there instead of none. 7 men stayed for a week, some of them, the working class did not stay but 3 days. I kept 3 of them in the new house, so you see I earned the few stamps I wasted trying to get the job on them. Then all was settled inside and outside in Daly's Dunquin but they would not hear each other talking. I would not be surprised if it would not since because I cursed them all bluffers and officers at first sight but all went well again and not much notice is taken to-day of a wireless Telephone on the Island. Its nice to be having the outside news through storm and dreary weather.

25.11.41. Then you misunderstand the sort of Wireless telephone

we have on the Island if you think we hear every programme and latest news from it, that is not so it only speaks to the next Post-master - the Daly Miss in Dunquin. Nobody else can hear or can take the news from the Island and she sends it to any part or to anywhere it wants to go to. The same article that's on the Island, the same thing was put into her house for the Island, besides that she has got a telephone herself. No War news comes to us unless she has any late ones to tell nor will anyone go to the post-master here for it unless there is a telegram to be sent out. But latest programmes or news we'll never hear on the Island through this object, nothing but a wireless set would carry them and the Island will do without that now on.

28.12.41. The Post-boy was outside to-day and that was the only canoe, and brought the sad news of the Post-man John Kearney who is very ill in the hospital with the last 3 weeks. His son is running the post yet anyway, his other son has the Post-office. His two sons went to see him yesterday and came home to-day saying he is dying away and all the Island is very sad. He never complained before and is only 65 years. They are all very sad.

I N I S H V I C K I L A U N E

10.9.39. Paddy Daly is still on Inishvickilaune fishing.

1.12.40. A few days ago, just last Thursday a small air-forced boat with 3 men landed in the Island. They were rescuers of the German Bomber that fell or landed at Inishvickilaune Strand last Monday after being damaged. They told the Islanders that two of their companions were in the same direction in another rubber and a canoe was sent out for its rescue. John Kearney brought the 3 men in his house where they were treated with kindness as he was in the canoe that found them near the coast. After a while two Islanders came home from the hill and they had a German too, they got him on the hill far back, so he told them he had a companion and that he fell down the cliff they were climbing up. These two were the rest of the crew, so another canoe went out to find the dead man who had fallen from the cliffs and brought ropes and things necessary and instead of finding the corps there was the man waving on them on the hill so they landed one of their crew and he brought on the much hunted German on his back. The Tiaracht Rock first noticed the light at Inishvickilaune and also the rockets and they challenged - Iveragh and so it was all read that something were at Inish. They were 3 nights there, so the 3 <sup>days</sup> ~~nights~~ were beautifully calm and they left the Inish for Blaskets and something happened the boat of two and it said that they swam to the Island.

Some steamer went to the Inish after they left but they came at 6 o'clock in the evenings for the Germans and also some police and they took the five away to I could not say where.

A canoe went looking at the wreckage to Inish yesterday but it was all broken by the sea. Anyway they had the satisfaction of seeing

corpse of a German Bomber there. All the Islanders were much excited, old women were nervous and frightened, young folk were full of joy and love the adventure.

25.12.40. Two weeks ago Patrick Daly, Senior, E Dunleary, a ~~Gu~~ Guiheen boy and my own brother Pádraig went to Inishvickilaune to stay for the night killing rabbits and such a storm came they ~~stay~~ stayed a week there. We were all afraid because they had not much flour nor tea nor groceries, but they had plenty potato and eat flour only once a day that was breakfast time. They killed plenty rabbits and eat them with the potatoes twice a day, they hadn't any pinch of salt either, they two older were very disgusted with the storm and ~~the~~ high wind, they slept together in their clothes (as there is not any beds there at present) near a very large fire with their oil coats thrown down on them. So one of the men said he was so deaf from the wind that he could not stand it any other day and if it wasn't anyway calm tomorrow to dig him a big hole in the ground opposite the house so that he could go down there and would have a rest from the wind. It was terrible strong too about 4 days and nights and the sea was so high going up on the mountain. How would you like to be there like that?

THE ISLANDERS.

28.10.38. I enjoyed, or we did, Reynolds News. Also Chamberlain's visit to Munich indeed very interesting. That woman with her daughter is another widow Mrs Guiheen, with them Robin Flower stays. Her father was called the King of the Island, she is a Princess then but he must be mistaken in calling her the Queen of the Island. He thought she was the King's wife instead of his daughter. A sister of this Mrs Guiheen is married in Dunquin and is always called the Princess. I'll tell you who are they now. This is the family that Mr Synge stayed with and the little hostess which he speaks a lot about is now the Princess married in Dunquin and although she was awful fond of children she has none. Her sister that was married just in the house is the Queen which "Reynolds" mean.

I did not go to Peg Sayer's yet with that piece, you know I must get the Irish book from her when I'll show her that. Sure I must be all set for that visit meaning a Royal visit. I laughed at it myself and thought it very good written by him. Explained everything awful didn't he. I thought it very good and loved to be reading it.

17.11.38. The Parliament House of the Island is closed at present for good.

10.12.38. Mrs Kearney, the lonely widow which owned Parliament House or Dáil as it used be called by all the visitors to the Island, though it was called that name long before any of them ever came, as all the old men used gather there years ago when the owner of the house lived with his family which they all went to Amer-

ica since, every night they used visit there and talk and putting questions to answer at each other, far difficult to answer than in the Leinster House most of the time.

That time the Keane King used to be postman and after he coming from his day trip he used have always good and bad news from the Mainland. Then the old folk used have all disappeared home at 10 o'clock and at that time the young folk used ramble in.

So she got the old age pension and went down to town and has got a room there with some friends. Islanders were very lonely after her, such shake hands and kisses when she was leaving she was very lonely herself too. She was not born an Islander herself.

Its no use talking of bad weather, it never came worse although not heavy gales yet, but the sea is always affected by heavy rains, this week was fair canoes were out for provisions with the last three days. They are not thinking of going to town at all this Christmas, the weather being too bad and lots of groceries are selling in Dunquin, it will be got there as well and home sooner you see now dear.

5.4.39. A fortnight of Merch and so far in April has given every satisfaction to Islanders. When fine weather comes after Winter like this it means lots of work inside and outside, as clothes are thrown upside down and everything is damp and out of order after Winter. Then in dry weather like this with lost of washing and water to be drawn from the well.

10.8.39. This Summer is far worse than last year and Islanders haven't seen much of the sun or sea either visitors. An outbreak of typhoid fever was in the parish of Moore District, West Kerry and was scattered around and 4 or 5 people died of it. This month when a record crowd used be here only 4 visitors are on the Island, 3 are

going tomorrow after spending 3 weeks here.

10.9.39. I think you hardly believe me when I told of that only 4 or 5 visitors were all that came to the Island this Summer. Indeed they had a good reason for not to come for they were ordered not to come as far as Dingle on account of the Fever, for the Mercy Hospital there was turned into a Fever Hospital.

22.10.39. No sign at all of war is seen on this Island yet, no wreck or shortage thank God. I do not like wreck at all around its very dangerous with people going out for it in all weather.

3.2.40. I was inside with an old widow a few nights ago, that grey woman you used see in the middle of the village, always outdoor when you are passing, well she had three lovely rooms in her house, her children are all in America only one son's that's married here, but not in her house, imagine her sitting in the corner alone thinking and looking at her empty house which her grandchildren should be playing and she know that she will never again see her dear ones again. Do you think how her heart is, she told me she sometimes don't know where is she at all or what's going to happen to her and she sleeps very very little. Then when storms come she is frightened to death that the fairly big house will fall down on her. Do you think she minds what happens her or which country that will win this war. She could not understand which would be the best for her, either she don't care nothing will take her out of this place now but her coffin and alas she is buried alive already with rather a long time.

I suppose you would be surprised to hear the real history and hardship of Islanders these days that every family is quite tired of the wind and the rain and would prefer to be in any other place in the

world than here. Meat and food and flour are all gone up in prices and they with other hardships of Islands together leave no hope at all for Islanders.

18.8.40. Pats Kearney's daughter Hanna which you know, you met her when we were there that day married outside a few weeks ago, near ~~XX~~ Ballyferriter she is married to a Shea boy. He is not a bit good-looking, but she is getting old and hates an old maid's time. She brought £60 there.

8.10.40. I did not feel the time spending on until this month, I hardly can believe its November next month, some are facing Winter every other day. Well, then God whatever it will bring us is no other man's power and I hope it will pass <sup>us</sup> unharmed as many fierce Winters have done.

30.10.40. Of course you would enjoy the wild scenery I know the high wild high waves coming in from Beginish to the Gravel Strand, and also the wind and waves breaking all the way from the Tiaract Rock to meet these from Beginish and embracing each other and coming in together into the strand. It was their nature anyway and thank God they were not to harm anybody and indeed I was telling myself that they are the best coast-guards any Island could have these days I mean these high waves. When we were coming back it was dark and there were no lights in the new house above only in the factory, I told her if all that were gone from our dear Island come back and brought money and wealth and built cottages and new house up from Peg's house away back to the hill that life would be fun again and worth living in our Island. She said she much admired this walk and pure breeze than being walking the streets of the city among lights there, I did



much rather walk in the darkenss of my youth and Island myself than being away in far off city where no peace or pleasure stay.

1.12.40. Potatoes are the chief food of Islanders these days. Indeed they are glad to have them to have a good dinner of them and also at 9 o'clock every night with salted markrel. They are satisfied with their lot. The Great men and women of our ancestors used eat them 3 and 4 times daily and indeed seldom any disease knocked them out until a ripe age.

22.3.41. You have asked me a question in your last letter about the girls and their husband. You see them girls married outside love the Island still and love the people they left there but could not find enough courage to marry there as married troubles are great ones and they could not face them inside these days with no old women helpers are any women you know as the people are reducing so is their courage going, I hope the Radio will put some life in them and that the rest will come together and join for life there. I know the girls married outside prefer a thousand times to be inside and they would get far better looking husbands inside.

25.11.41. There will not be any candles this year. I have two since last year which will do Christmas Night and the night after. There isn't any parrafin oil with the last two months and the old custom of which we call "Slize" that is the cover of a box of shoe polish with wick covered with seal oil, that is the small light on everybody's table these long nights. We don't complain of it, and a good turf fire burning and nobody is hungry so far thank God for that. Islanders feel happy amidst hard times until anybody is sick this time of the year always.

28.12.41. The oil used with the wick is wax or oil from seals. Large

pieces of wax, or wax sheets were got at sea during the Summer but not everyone got'em and those that did they had to share it with lots of people even from outside in the country looking and asking for it.

4.4.42. All the Islanders drink some kind of coffee for a substitute, but the lucky ones who have families in America get tea from them. I don't know would you try or can you send us a few pounds of tea, if you have them. Surely when tea comes by post from America why should not it come from England from a friend. Islanders get it very hard to manage without their mugs of tea, this time anyway when milk is very very scarce.

13.1.43. The worst storm that came with the last 40 or 50 years came just a fortnight before this Holy season. Nearly every house on the Island was someway damaged, expecially felted houses. The King's Palace (One day Keane's) went to ruins and the passage by sea was in one big wave that nearly coveredd the whole Island. Not one grain of sand was left on the White Strand and the big long derricks which was brought in from sea was swept out to Dunquin where they were welcomed for making Winter's fire. Then it was all the week fierce and there was no thought of going out to Dunquin for Christmas so the day before Christmas Eve, everyone are a sheep was killed in every house on the Island. Then Christmas Eve all was well on the Island for the day was lovely just like Summer's and 5 canoes went out shopping until 5 o'clock in the evening, there was no meat there such as pigs head or a piece of ham but they got tea and some sugar there. So God is always good to poor Islanders and gives them everything for this Holy Season.

10.2.43. Many people are getting married around here since Shrove began a thing which did not happen with the last ten years. Fishermen with the grass of a few cows and that has turf on the land seems very happy. Another Island girl who is in service at Ballyferriter is getting married next week are after a Keane girl, a young good-looking boy with four cows and is a fisherman and she needs no fortune at all, the girl hasn't it either. There were a large family of the Keanes there and a poor fam-

ily. There were Mary, Nellie, Paddie, Mike, Bridget, Kate, Maurie, Seán and Nora and this one Eilish Keane who si to get married, two of them in America one married, one of the boys in the Army, only one of them are home on the Island now with his parents.

30.11.43. After the War you must fly first to ~~Ireland~~ the Island with an aeroplane full of old maids for the Island's old bachelors.

P E G.

26.9.38. There are two visitors here at present. Above in Mrs Guiheen's they are staying, not with the Queen though. Its a pity it could not be translated, I mean Peg's book. I will do my best in translating for you some of it this Winter if I can atall just that you will see what it is like.

28.10.38. I know you like the Queen very much and anything I can do for you I will do it I mean anything you would enjoy. I would do a piece for the fun of it, any funny piece in it I would try. I am sure Peg will lend me the book in Irish. Its the only one in the Island.

11.6.39. So you are without your King and Queen at present. I like any pictures of them on their journey. I am very interested in the Royal Family. Maybe I am thinking of being the Queen of the Island yet as you said yourself, after Peg's death. But she has the excuse of burning her crown but she kept the prize, the £50.

10.9.39. I was on a visit to the Queen last Sunday, I thought of you because I was not in there since you were here and then of course we all talked about you. I took a stroll back the new road above Peg's house then either and I came down to her house for an hour or so. Of course she knows how the war is going and how will it end and so on but I don't think she hasn't much power to prevent it or even herself if an air raid comes down at the palace. She ~~six~~ also thinks it will make a terrible war with all the world in it.

3.2.40. I will do my very best now to try and write to explain it all for you dear friend. Take the Queen "Peg Sayers", she is a little bit well off than the beginning of her life as she told you herself. She got some money through her son's death in America may-

be a few hundreds, the most beautiful boy you ever saw, she well paid for them, who would envy her of that money when it broke her heart first, then she got it out of books, her second story-book is selling at present, did I not tell you that? It is very nice and interesting, true stories. One story tells of 3 big boats from Dunquin that came to Beginish Island for manuring-weed, so when the first one had their full of the boat for weed they left for Dunquin at once, the north easterly wind blew harder and harder and the tide was very strong and they did not take the right side out, so the Lord save us they had not time to empty their boat or say their prayers when then it went down beneath them, then it turned out two men saved themselves (out of the seven men) that gripped the keel of the boat and when the second boat came to their aid after emptying out their own the two men were saved although they were in a very serious condition they lived long lives afterwards, two years ago one of them died in Dunquin. So it was a sad day in Dunquin with five widows and their children crying and moaning on Dunquin's quay. Peg witnessed the sight. Her own brother was in the rescuer's boat. The tragic boat was called "Body" and ever since the place is called "Body's Bank" where they were drowned. So there is a light for you on one of Peg's stories which is called in English "Old woman's memory."

But Peg is very getting old now, and she is always weather-bound since she came to the Island, living in a lonely cottage now on with her only son and he getting on in years with no wife or family or nothing of life's joys which no money could buy but

which you could not have without money, no cow or milk to spare, I may say not much to comfort them a tall. If she was somewhere near town or near a chapel Peg would walk out and refresh herself with something anyway she would be quiet happy to go to Mass Sundays or evenings a gay talk with someone or see the cars and people of the world passing her. She has nothing to make her home happy here, no hope a tall.

25.12.40. After Dinner to-day, which contained a young fat goose I took Niam to the top of the Village on to Barra Caibe which we call it, to my Uncle's house near Pats Kearney. The house is calm as there isn't any family and after spending a few hours there, as we were passing the Queen when went in to see her, with the Kettle boiling on a lovely fire she greeted us warmly also her obedient servant - her brother-in-law - was there and she gave Niam a good half of a very rich cake she received from a visitor last night, a lady which remembers her every year with a long ~~ix~~ time she said. She told me she was very lonely last night (Christmas Eve) as she hadn't any letters from America, but she hopes to get one afterwards, as she is always a one of great and good hopes. She is very well also the Prince Mike. She says there is no fun or company in the Islands nowadays and that its worse its getting from year to year. It was tea time for Her Majesty and we bade her good-bye and best wishes for the New Year.

We enjoyed a fine pint of hot tea with my husband when we came home. So now its John's turn to go ~~xxx~~ visiting and I'll stay in the rest of the night.

6.2.41. Her Majesty's son is sick from Christmas, the doctor attended him a few weeks ago and after he went out, he sent him

in a private Nurse until he is out of danger, of course its the Board of Health that will pay her. Its a kidney trouble he has. He is getting better. I pity Her Majesty, the only man and hope of their house and worker. I never before heard of anyone of the Island having any such trouble.

6.3.41. Peg's son is in hospital with the last 4 weeks now ~~is~~ very slow he is getting a little better.

6.11.42. You may have not heard that also our Queen Peg has come out and is once more living in Dunquin in her native place her brother-in-law was very very lonely but Mike was not, nor either Peg I heard. So pity our Island without King nor Queen this Winter nor child on its ground, no wonder its lonely and sad after all the gay families and all his children in foreign grounds.

Remember you once told me that Peg - The Queen - must be very happy there on the Island, I told you there was nothing there in life to make her happy and like all Queens she had a bit of money too but far from being happy, nobody knows the worries and nervous that follows an Island's life.

10.2.43. I hear that Peg and Old Mike and the young poet are enjoying life in the Queen's <sup>old</sup> birth-place. Its a very lonely spot and way up beneath the mountains but of course people visit them there and they can come down anytime visiting them, but you see that the Queen is one-age to yourself and am sure has many collections in her Palace to keep her mind steady during the day and then a bit of reading at night.

From the 1st November we have an awful bad weather here, wind and rain nearly every day. Very dark evenings and long nights. I don't feel the bad nights at present anyway, reading "The Crock of Gold" around the fire. It is very nice and funny, and also the Dictionary with me all the time. One paraffin lamp in the kitchen that's all. We use candles in our room. We sometimes have a look at "The Kerryman" and "Irish Press". Nora (the school-mistress) gets then papers twice weekly, she passes them around of course.

I don't work much, Winter now, I don't even go to the hill out to the strand for sand (this is for the floor of the house) with the donkey, some evenings sewing and knitting and reading. I'll knit a pair of stockings for you, I don't know would you like them, tell me in your next letter.

Shawn is home from the hill now with a load of turf. I like Shawn very much, he is with me everywhere, if you were to see me with him fencing a garden at present you would laugh at me with my spade in my hand digging for clay.

Last night as I told you was rather bad. <sup>We</sup> ~~XX~~ only went visiting to the nearest house. Three boys were also there and the owner of the house Padraic Daly was playing a violin for us. About ten o'clock the three boys got up and said they were going home. So they went out and left us half an hour or more with the fiddler. We started home about half ten and we were very near the house, Mary and myself, when I noticed the big white things ~~a~~ sitting in our door. Mary also saw it then and we frightened out, Nothing was to be done but to scream out "the Lord save us". I frightened I thought of the dead man that was buried a week ago. I believed he was at our door. Daddy opened the door and the dogs ran out, and my three dev..ls took the white sheet



off themselves and they were dying laughing, I tell you that I didn't laugh at all, honestly I could not after the fear you know.

To-day morning was very fine, everyone on Blaskets got themselves ready for the hill. Some brought their asses to bring turf, others brought their cows and calves, while yet others went strolling looking for sheep. They were not an hour gone when it began to rain terrible. Nobody expected it so soon. They are home now drenched. The turf and the people and animals are all wet. Dad and Padraic are putting on their new clothes after the morning. The cows are driven home now everything locked up in its own place after the rain and storm. I think no one will stir tonight. Reading will be delightful tonight. Does any bad day or night like this comes in London.

It was too cold and we gathered around the fire. Daddy was singing old songs for us. He can sing very well and the old Irish songs that are not written in books at all at present are very nice to hear. After the Rosary we went to bed. I slept sound until morning. When I opened the door it was not so grand a view I got. I first set my eyes on the sea, but alas no hope either to-day of any boat crossing. If it was fine and sunny on the land itself here we don't call it fine until the sea is calm.

13

St Abbey's Day ( ~~XX~~th February) was not fine at sea and no canoe did go to Mass, but to-day was lovely and Eilish did not forget to go down to the slip. It was the first thing the postman took out of the bag and all eyes were on it as usual when any parcel is taken out, everyone wishing it to himself of course. When I took it home ~~EVERY~~ we were all excited looking at it, the dress was lovely and the coat too, Shawn put it on and he thinks himself a Civic Guard already in it. It suits him lovely. He will wear it every Sunday and is very P

proud of it too and says that it was to himself you sent it. I told him that it was.

Of our family indeed it is hard to tell what is before us in this life. You know in the passed years as they were grown up here they used go to America one after one. The eldest first and then every year then from that out one after one would go through until the last of the family. No one is going at present but we hope for better life yet. I suppose Mary would be thinking of going to America. Shawn is thinking of joining the Civic Guard in a couple of years time. There are lots of boys in them you know. Patrick my eldest brother may yet marry here and Mike, myself I don't know what will become of us. We must go through life of course and we won't get it at all as we like to. Oh I know. Inside <sup>in</sup> my heart I love to stay at home if I'd have any work to do to live on like having a nice house and having lodgers in Summer here I would love that but I don't know will that ever come true. I have no thoughts of getting married at all yet.

The people here are very busy at present, cutting turf and making pots (lobster pots.) Shawn is out in the country (that is on the main land) staying with a friend these days. and Michael and Padraic are out today looking for willows. They stayed out to-night and they'll come home tomorrow evening. So the house is very very quiet tonight. I do miss Shawn very much when he is out. I do have great sport with him always, talking English with him and everything. I like Shawn very much. He has no interest at all in the world only enjoying himself.

(The end of March) I was on the hill to-day morning with my cow and calf and donkey I left them with the cows and went for a load of turf, old turf. X Everyone in the house except mother and Mary, were in the strand for weed you know sea-weed for manuring and most of the

Islanders too were there. When the tide is very very low they go out on the stones or rocks and cut it off with knives and then put it together in a rope and put it on their backs then. They bring it to the fields thays near on their backs but the donkeys bring it if the fields are too far off. They do be very wet and they are all changing their clothes now after coming home.

If you were to see Shawn and myself working at our garden indeed far from being idle, we have determined to put turnips and carrots and cabbage growing in it, don't be laughing now because you'll eat some of them yet. Will you?

(June) everyone here are very very busy here these days. At the sea fishing the men and the women at the hill making reeks of the turf. I was at the hill yesterday, Mary and myself from half past nine in the morning untill half seven in the evening.

(July) very soon now we'll have the new potatoes. The blue stone and wash were spread on 'em last week. Daddy and Shawn did it. Do you remember spreading it last year. We had no fun atall to-day. No football or anything atall to spend the day.

I am not on the hill atall to-day, I am cleaning <sup>up my</sup> ~~my~~ room here, white-washing it first. Its easy to do so because it is a small room and there is nothing in it but a table, a cupboard and our bed. Also a chair. The walls are decorated with postcards from you. There are no fine pictures on the walls atall. I am here sitting on my bed now writing you this and you are in some fine hotel or house in the island of Donegal.

There isn't so much people in any house in the island. In our house imagine father and mother in bed, Padraic and Mike in bed, Shawn and my grandfather in a bed, and mary and myself in another bed, two

beds in one room and one bed in the other two rooms. Three rooms we have. I am very sure that in some of the houses small houses you know where there isn't, but one room with two beds in it, some of them sleep in the loft of the room in a checker down you see. Small children, in two and three can sleep in one bed, I often saw when we were small ourselves, I do think of Mary and myself sleeping in the bed with father and mother, two in the head of the bed and the other two below. When we were bigger Daddy built a small cosy room for us and we are since.

I can hear Shawn in the kitchen now playing the old violin. I love to hear him play. He is very able to.

(October) In our garden we had some cabbage, turnips and carrots too. We never before had any garden. We gave them to nearly everyone on Blaskets. Everyone liked them. We hadn't any onions growing but we get 'em from a man in Dunquin every year. Shawn and myself has brought home three half-sacks of potatoes since and he always leave me do everything, but he is very tall now and strong and when we are boxing I am no good at all.

Well the boxing gloves you sent are a great sport Shawn and padraic enjoy them every evening and all the boys in the village come in to see 'em. We never before saw them only in the book.

Listen here, I have this much to tell you. Mother is always asking me to tell you would you know of cards to card wool. They used to be here not very long ago but you wouldn't get them now for any money in Dingle town anyway. They would be very very handy here. Could you ever find us a pair in Dublin or anywhere.

My brother Shawn has just arrived here to me. Now he asks to whom I am writing, I do tell him, "Eilish" he do say "Now you don't tell

him anything since you married, anything about me at all. He don't ever send me any coat or trousers like he used to. I wish you were single again and at home with us. Now tell him I am wearing yet his navy coat he sent me. If you'll tell him, he'd send me another one ~~or~~ maybe." "Sure" said I "How would I be paying for your parcels." (at that time there was a small duty on parcels of that nature.) "Oh that's the thing now." Well I laughed at him. The way he walks in and tells me his troubles. Well honestly I love my brother Shawn. Himself and Mary don't agree as we used to. Shawn is always thinking of the Civic Guards but did not join them yet, of course he did not get any exam call yet. Its all Irish (speaking) with them. There are three Islanders in the force at present. "Twenty Years Agrowing" (Maurice O'Sullivan) the fourth person, of course he is not in the guards now. He lives in Connemara, Galway, with his wife.

(<sup>th</sup>November '56) Paddy, Michael, Shawn and Mary are still at home together. None married, no thoughts of getting married on this island Romance and Cupid died here, as true as you are living in Hampstead. I don't know will any stir come for ever again or anything to encourage the Islanders.

THE GREAT BASKET

We are poor simple people, living from hand to mouth. I fancy we should have been no better off if we had been misers. We are apt and willing to live, without repining, the life the Blessed Master made for us.

This is a crag in the midst of the great sea, and again and again the blown surf drives right over it before the violence of the wind, so that you daren't put your head out any more than a rabbit that crouches in his burrow when the rain and the salt spume are flying. Often would we put to sea at the dawn of day when the weather was decent enough, and by the day's end our people on land would be keening us, so much had the weather changed for the worst. It was our business to be out <sup>in the night</sup> at ~~night~~ and the misery of that sort of fishing is beyond telling. Often and again the sea would drive over us so that we could see the land no more only praying from moment to moment for the help of God.

One day there will be none left in the Basket of all I have mentioned and I have done my best to set down some record of us, for the like of us will never be again.

T H E   G R E A T   B L A S K E T

We are poor simple people, living from hand to mouth.  
I fancy we should<sup>have</sup> be no better off

Galway County Council Archives

T H E "L O N E W O L F"

( When I paid my first visit to the Gt Blasket in 1931, Mitchell, an amiable but rather feckless individual, had just been given a derelict shack by the Islanders, at some remote period it had probably be used as a store-house or stable, there was only one door but no window, the place measured about seven feet by nine or less. On the occasion of my second visit in 1930 a window had been added and the door transferred to the opposite side <sup>of the</sup> building. He was then working his cut-down canoe but as there was a great gap in the tarred canvas a little above the water-line the Islanders were always expecting tragic end to Michell's lonely excursions. )

Mitchell, the man with the blue eyes has his house fixed for himself at present. He is living in it now and there are no windows atall. Last night we went into his house. You know him, the poor man. He is living alone in the small unfurnished house. His mother living in town (Dingle), an old age pensioner, supports him. Mary and two more girls and myself walked in to him. His bed is in one corner of the house near the fire. A spring-bed and an old mataress without much clothes. A cup and saucer, an old tea-pot and a small kettle, also a tin gallon to boil potatoes. He had no flour last night, no bread, only potatoes. He made a big fire but the turf was very wet and he hung the tin on it with some potatoes. He had a job I tell you trying to make a fire of it, which he did in the end and about ten o'clock that time he ate six or seven of the potatoes. The candle was nearly out so we had to come home and leave him alone. We sometimes bring him bread and candles and things because if we were anyway comfortable he'd tell us many stories. He is out of groceries now and the



next fine day he'll go out again. He'll go to town to his mother. Poor Mitchell, he has no sense at all. After all he travelled.

Mitchell now has a canoe and puts out and is very happy at present and manages it himself, of course he gets help too when he comes to the shore. He had two nets all the time since he came here at all, but then he sold 'em and bought the canoe and all is right now. I saw him alone going out to the Frenchman and he wasn't long rowing it near the boat. He had three dozen lobsters to-day at 9s per dozen. Not all the bad, because he knows how to spend it now.

You know Inishvickilaun, the other Island where we landed and made tea, you also know that there is another <sup>small</sup> Island between that and Blasket, well Mitchell is staying in that Island at present, alone too. He brought his mattress and everything with him and is fishing around it. Hasn't he got nerves, to sleep there alone every night. There is no house there anyway but he has some cave to dwell in. He is a little fairy I think. I pity him poor man.

If you were to see Mitchell one of these days, mending his canoe, you see he is making it lots smaller than last year. Indeed his mind is on his work. He has put a new cover or canvas on his boat, he has got no tar to put on it. What a pity Eilish wouldn't have a camera, I would have his photograph one of these days, but of course stolen.

Mitchell got short <sup>in</sup> of everything here so he tried his luck somewhere around Dingle's coast, he brought his canoe with him. He is home from Dingle to-day after spending a few spared pounds he had. He brought home a half sack flour and some groceries. He will live through winter now no doubt.

They have finished the Relief Work, four shillings a day and

that won't last very long either, a small pay too, but Mitchell will buy another half sack and that will do him until Summer. God is good and he always do send something to the poor in the hard times.

Mitchell went to town and drank his health. He came home here without anything at all to his home. Is not he a blind fool, after all his year spent for nothing. He hasn't anything to eat but dry bread now and he hasn't much to spare of that either.

A visitor from Dublin is here for a week. She takes a trip into Mitchell's house now and then. Someone advised her to tell Mitchell to put ~~axwindow~~ another door on his house, opposite the other one. So he has determined to do so very soon. He has put the door now on the below side facing the sea, also he has made a window. It is terrible at present. His bed no spring, no mattress or anything, but he is as healthy as a seal. God bless him. He has got three shillings a week now ~~doe~~ money and four lbs beef, so there you are. Miracles do Happen.

Mitchell is fishing alone with four pots. I was inside in his shag the other day. I brought him some milk poor man he does be thirsty after coming in from the sea. There is very little furniture in the house and a bed of hay on the floor with an old blanket. Well he is happy anyway.

Mitchell is not here at present, he is staying in town with his mother as he has nothing atall here to live on since the Dole money was taken away from all single men.

Mitchell is not alone now, an Islander who travelled in America and came again but not as empty as himself. They are living in the old shag, and they cook their own meals. I suppose they won't make much profit at sea yet as better Islanders would not risk it so early in the year

The lobster season is I am afraid at end now again by the bad weather, all the time Mitchell works alone in his old canoe, as happy as Larry, always happy, this year he stayed in that other Island again where nobody stays, neither is there any house or hiding place there for nightsheltering. He has done good at the lobsters there and comes here when he wants to. He is just another Robinson Crusoe. He has frightened them here for anyone can't stand all he does and no regular meals or sleep at all.

Thank God the hospital (this was after the influenza epidemic) is cleared <sup>again</sup> ~~agin~~ to-day. There were six beds and one each was given to the poorest of the Islanders. I like to have Mitchell get one and I spoke a word for him but I'm sorry I can't say in this letter yet did he receive one or not.

There were a heavy wind and seas here last Thursday. I am sure it was a hurricane and Friday morning the news went around the Island & that Mitchell's three-quarter canoe was gone by the wind and gale. So you need not be afraid now that it will leave him out at sea. So he can't have it both ways you know he got a bed and a lamp too to hang on the wall and he is quite satisfied and thankful. So you may as well not to delay in coming to Mitchell's Hotel because the bed is everybody's seat and it may be out of orders before you come.

I wish you could see Mitchell's garden, he has potatoes set and onions, and such a fence around the shag. He is doing fine.

Mitchell is staying in town with a very long time. He is no longer an Island fisherman nor either a town labourer, and his garden is dying for manure. He came for a few days trip and when he had eaten all <sup>his</sup> ~~the~~ bread he brought with him he went home again, his old mother is his War Trouble. He did not go to sea at all this year. You need

not fear of him being drowned at all.

Mitchell sold out early in the year and thinks the old ~~palace~~ cabin no suitable palace for him any more. Mitchell is no joke now.

Sean met Mitchell in town some time ago, he lives with his aged mother there and was telling Sean he would be happier in the Island than here in town and says he would have a bit of land there for to set something and Sean told him he wasn't so good when he was there and took everything too easy. Certainly he don't like not being praising him.

( Eilish now writes from the Mainland ) We spent a good fortnight on the Island. although the first weather was of a very severe weather then it calmed down again and Mitchell went to sea in his small canoe. He lives in the Queen's Palace that is in Peg's house one time. He came to the Island and had got the key from Peg's son Mike and is living there alone and is feeling very happy. I was talking to him and he said "Hallo Mrs Crohan; how is John?" "We are grand Mitchell, how are you getting on yourself? You are not a day old since I saw you last." "I have got the old age pension then with the last 3 or 4 months and I am very comfortable where I am staying above there, a nice room and very warm and there is a splendid air around here." "Have you got any lobsters, Mitchell?" "Oh yes, I have a dozen, and they are over £2 you know, a very good price here. How are the children enjoying themselves here?" "They are doing fine they love to be around like yourself Mitchell."

But he got very old since I saw him last but he has a good energy and rows himself and always say that he has travelled far and near and that the Island was the best clay he ever set his foot on.

T H E " M I D G E T "

10.5.40. A woman visitor from Tipperary is on the Island with a week and says she will stay three months. She is the biggest size of a woman we ever saw. She is unmarried and is 35. She likes to have an Islander as a husband. None of them would not marry her. She is living on money interest £110 a year. She is a great sport, full of jokes and humour. She has taken lots of photos of Niam and us. So I will not forget you at all when she will give them to me. She is ~~stuck~~ struck on that one you took of Niam alone with the sweet in her hand but I could not part with the only one I have, I would ne very ~~pleas~~ pleased if you could get me one more of them as she is so mad for it, also another one of Peg. I don't like to refuse her you know.

29.6.40 Imagine the size of a lady she is!!! (Size 1000)

24.7.40. The big visitor lady from Tipperary is here still and last Monday she visited the Tiaract Rock. She hired my husband, Sean and Paddy and one of the young Dalys to take her there for the day. Although they were sure of their 10/- a man and the day was lovely, they were afraid she was too heavy and troublesome for to land there, so when they were about to land there two lightkeepers were inside and they brought down a rope for at the landing block it was a very low tide and she could not land safe, so the two inside threw a rope into the canoe and a hitch was put on her body and the two inside began to haul up the big horse (ha há ) lady and they could not do so for any money so they said if her photograph was taken and she hanging on for a couple of minutes and the canoe used go in to help them up with the heavy load, it was the most surprising photo ever taken. Her fingers were all scraped and her feet and thighs. No harm was done to her by the rope but she said that her belly was sore in the

evening, a good cause to make people have a good laugh at her after the day.

Any snaps she gives me from Tiaract I will send you some.

Sean told me he was thinking of you that day if you were there with a camera what a good photo the lady in the rope would be to you.

She has to read all your letters, she is very curious and tells me to send you her love. I am sure you will praise her of her courages voyage in your next letter. She loves to be praised you know.

18.8.40. What do you think of the Little Midget? She has come down here with the last two weeks. She is staying in my own room above in the corner, that which I thought was not good enough for you, but she is very nice and likes rest and reading and thought Kearney's not at all suitable for her in any way. She used to go up on a ladder to her room above so that was awful for a little woman. ha ha. She used not get enough food there. She pays £1 a week. Well she keeps the house in good order in food and supplies, we were too thankful to have her in these hard times when everything else was closed up, and so dear. She says she will stay until November and then will go out and spend Winter with Mary, and to come in to us again in April. "Its a bad wind that blows nobody good." We were too glad to have her and we will give her enough of her own money, bread and jam and butter and an egg for breakfast a few slices of bacon for Dinner two or thrice weekly, fresh fish some dessert after Dinner cornflour or jelly. Of course she takes little trouble but I am glad of the chance and I am very willing to work for

£1 a week its long before since we got so much and I am sure John Kearney do miss it now since she is gone from him.

10.9.40. The "Big Mary" is able to sing very nice, she has many songs. She is a month with us now and is very happy. I tell the "Big Miss" that you will send her a big necklace at Christmas, it must be very long though. She don't get many things, for her parents are dead and she was an only child. She is very fond of sweets. She bought a gallon tin of them last Sunday and they only lasted but 4 days, of course she is very generous too.

8.10.40. We have the Tipp Midget staying with us yet and intends to stay until some time in November. Indeed she takes trouble but we are glad to have her when everything else is so closed up and no chance at all of earning any money. The £1 a week is a luxury even if I have to work a bit hard for it. She is a great bother about the Irish Language and she is not much good at it. She went to town with Sean a week ago, also Paddy. A motor car from town came for her (at Dunquin) and you may be sure brought us a lot of sweets and dainties, also a few toys for Niam. She has a big and soft heart as big as herself. ha ha. She will always have to get your letters. If you were to hear me reading out one of your letters to her and what was in it you would be curious to know but you asking me some questions before Niam was born. I thought I was never so simple as asking you them questions and you said it was just like taking a tooth out in London. Ah I had a few good laughs out of my heart, I am sure you too looks through my letters and have a good laugh sometimes.

If you would send me on any sort of books, I would be glad for this lady's sake for she does nothing else to amuse but reading. If they cost her a few pence to pay she would not mind. I hope you will send on any sort Novels or anything, surely they will not be returned then.

30.10.40. I went back to Carrah-na-raga for a walk with my "Little Midget" this evening after tea indeed she had plenty Irish but she isn't much good anyway.

7.2.41. The Big Lady is staying with Mary ever since and has a radio set now. She may come in again to us but I don't know I would not be too struck on her for she wasn't all there in many ways but as times are hard and money is so scarce to make here I am sure I will have to put up with her for my £1 a week's sake during Summer on.

22.3.41. The "Tiny Tot" will not return to us. We are not sorry anyway.

22.3.41. The Tipperary Lady says she will come in to us again on the 1st June. She has bought a wireless set now, it will be a great joy when she comes in.

24.8.41. The "Tiny Tot" will not return to us. We are not sorry anyway.



## ENGLISH LEAVES THE ISLAND

Indeed can't you see that the Island is bare with only one child ( nine years before there were thirty-five ) and three at school with no hope or promising of any other but just a face telling you from day to day that this Island will be with none at all but rabbits some fine evening and it is not fit for any other nature. Islanders see nothing before then these days, the children grow up and no good place to go, the children of the Island seven years ago are men and women with their future blanked and black. The parents now if life was not so dull would be with the last four or five years holding their son's children on their knees and children talking merry and dancing around their kitchen. Do you think the father and mother who is looking of their family getting old and unhappy lacking the pleasure of life could be happy themselves, indeed no.

I was inside with an old widow a few nights ago, well she has three lovely rooms in her house, her children are all in America only one son that's a man here, but not in her house. Imagine her sitting in <sup>the</sup> a corner alone thinking and looking at her empty house which her grandchildren should be playing and she know that she will never again see her dear ones again. Do you think how her heart is, she told me she sometimes don't know where is she at all or what's going to happen ~~ka~~ her. Then when storms come she is frightened to death that the fairly big house will fall down on her. Nothing will take her out of this place now but her coffin and also she is buried alive already with rather a long time.

Another house has been closed on the Island lately. She was an old woman the Kearneys mother and she went out to her daughter, she

had an only son in the house and he himself used leave the Island every Winter and stay in the same house his mother stays now. So picture our Island home sinking from day to day.

A great question has arisen amongst the Island People this year and almost every Sunday here in my own house we are arguing about it when four or five girls and some boys are gathered in to spend their bad idle evenings. Of course these unmarried young simple folk think that we two have a far more knowledge and understanding in Island life at present than themselves, being married there so many years now and so on, this important question is whether the Island will gain school and gain or will it arise again or altogether lose everything and die out.

The young boys think it will arise again and are highly praising it always, moreover some of these who were thinking of joining the Civic ~~IRISH~~ Guard or some Government position some years ago and failed now think the Island is their only prosperous means of living and will have to die with it and in doing this must have a wife at the first start, then the girls are taken easy here are reared easy and have seen a few Island girls of later years get married to some small local farmers and when they dress up themselves and their husbands on a fine Sunday and stroll in to see the old neighbours after being down in mud the rest of the week before, these Island girls think they are very wealthy indeed and thinks that they have no worry at all since they joined the mainland and so nothing would put it out of their heads that some husband would do with the grass of one cow on the mainland outside and leave the dear old farm for a Sunday call in with the husband.

Whom do you think are right? What side would you side? and will

the Island rise or sink? Give full answer in your next letter friend. Myself thinks it will never die. I always have good hopes but I'm sure that's my nature, the lovely moonlight night air and sweet calm evening breeze on the sand and shores of my Island home have taught me always free as a bird, free sea air and land.

We have determined at last to leave this lovely Island, I know you will be very sad to hear it, but things are not as they should be and times are changed and expecially for us here with a child at school age and no school and people saying and telling us the child must go to school very soon. They may take her away somewhere when they think of it you know, so we thought it best to go out somewhere ourselves and try and have at least one joy out of this hard life, to live with our child. So the next time you will come to this Island there will not be no Eilish but the ruins of our house, only the walls; we are taking out the head of the house, I mean the roof and windows and everything, there near Ballydavid as John's friends are living there on fishing. You may be sure I'll miss the calm air of our dear Island and the beautiful White Strand. Visitors coming in and going out of our house, talking and talking, and they on their holidays, having comfortable home and no worry during Winter or Summer, would never believe the misfortunex on this Island, no school nor comfort, no road to success, no lobsters last Summer very scarce hard times everything so dear and so far away. Surely people could not live on air and sunshine. No not atall.

I was very troubled when this commenced but when I am understanding and looking at it from other sides I am getting all right again, for instance girls who grew up with me and went to America years ago and made their home there, never saw their parents since nor the

Island, Surely I have shared many I may say happy years there; whatever happens on this Island I have one gifted thing to tell you of it I was always happy there. I was happy among sorrows on this Island. I think I will not be interest~~ed~~g in life atall from this on when I am gone out to the mainland.

You can understand that there is an amount of worry when you are waiting for a thing to come that is not coming. I will take my hens and chickens but not a cow of course. John will surely take his canoe Our house will be built new with gravel and cement, it is not completed yet although a small house with a roof-felted its a great trouble to make it look anyway comfortable and then the journey there is very long and carrying things out and up and getting carts to bring them is I tell you a great trouble. (John, with the help of his brothers and friends built the cottage.) You may hear it from me and believe me we get so troubled and mixed talking of leaving and living outside there and whether it would be easier ~~andxxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxx~~ to make a livelihood there means worry and trouble, and dear friend be sure that it means to us our "Niam." Surely you would understand it yourself to send our only child somewhere out add be without her here on the Island would mean to be underground to us. So will have to follow the Little Star whatever way things will turn.

We left the Island the 14th day of July (1942) and I'll tell you the real truth, since we began thinking of leaving the Island until I slept in this house at Murreigh, you may believe I've suffered and if death is as hard it is too bad to go through it. You know for Niam's sake and hardships of life we came here but my heart is somewhere on the Island. I wonder how did it not speak to your letter and say "Ah give me that letter from Q., I am Eilish's heart left by her

for that letter always made me glad and happy"

I intended returning after a few weeks for to bring out some old ware and things but when I was out and understood that I was here for good Oh I had not the courage of making a second trip of leaving, so I did not leave anyone Good Bye nor Good Luck that day nor will I see my Island again until next Summer.

Mary visited me last Sunday, she had been to the old home, mother said that it was as lonely as death when we left the Island, and that my father could not sleep nor eat and that our going had made them years older. I cried because I knew that the truth was spoken so with God's help I will make a stroll this Summer.

A man from this place drove us in a trap and pony and my two brothers Mike and Sean awaited us at Dunquin. It was a lovely day, you may be sure my heart did rise when I first caught sight of my Island, Oh boy! at that moment I did not envy or would <sup>not</sup> exchange life with Queen Elizabeth of England. It was about six o'clock when we reached the Island and all the women and girls were there below entirely to welcome us. We went up to my own house at home (that is the home of Eilish's childhood) and father and mother awaited us joyously. I was so happy, but they were to hear that we were leaving again Tuesday morning but all the same it did them good like ourselves to have a good look at each other after long and lonely two years. I found mother rather aged since and weak looking but father is fat and sturdy just the same. Monday morning I awakened, I told myself I had one morning in my Island home free from any worries about the outside world was full of. We visited the old cabin I thought the old walls welcomed us home, whata strange idea. One Island girl said to me "Eilish how oftended you white washed these walls and they are as white yet as the

day you left." Yes I thought of Tomas ( Eilish's Father-in-law) and of the old comforts that were in the good old times. I felt sad but all the same I thought that life was too dull and too lonely through the Winter months, I would rather come out to dry land. "Mother dear" I said to mother "don't cry, how many mothers around you that did not see their daughters with the last 12 or 15 years and have no hopes of seeing them again and we are not far away from you and we'll come to you any time you are in need of us."

Niam showed me a book a few nights ago and a photograph of the old house in the Island in it, I was nearly crying when I saw it, those sands of memories were running through my mind of how I used see the old pictures of the sea so calm and the seagulls crying and the canoes coming in from the mainland, and the White Strand, white with sand, how crowds of us after school used play together on it like one family, so scattered now and not even one child on this lonely white sands. A great pity, what do you think?

I took a view of my Island home just a Sunday a month ago, Mary and her husband were going to see Mike, they also took two of the children, a boy and a girl 5 and 6 years old I think, but I did not like the children to be with us, it wasn't worth while you know for a couple of hours and they were vying and screeching going in. Their mother was half frightened but I was on another canoe and I was glad. We just saw the old friends and mother looked frail and thin and poor Mike goes out with a cane to help him, God help us, but all the same he is a lot better, he was very lonely when we were leaving I felt lonely myself but sure I thought there were many hearts abroad that very evening who would give anything of getting or setting eyes on home friends.

We may ourselves go back to the Island some day.

On the 15th September, a Mail Day for Islanders - we set our sails for the Island, John borrowed a trap and pony from the neighbourhood and told us to jump in and drove up to Dunquin at about 11 o'clock. We made for the Post-Office so that we may meet the postman and the Post-mistress told John the postman had left her just a few minutes before. So off we went to Dunquin Pier below and we just there in good time to meet the ~~a~~ crew of three men just starting for the Island, They welcomed us and were glad to see we were going in. Cathleen was sea-sick and Niam was not but was so delighted to ~~be~~ be going in one would think she was going to heaven.

We made for my old home and only the old parents were there before us, Sean and Paddy were lobster-fishing at sea and Mike was still in bed as he do not get up untill after ~~breakfast~~ dinner every day, he got up at once he was so delighted. We brought in some bottles of Guinness also some white bread and butter so we eat and drank and smoked cigarettes for the rest of the ~~day~~ evening and had all the news from them and for them since last year.. The most beautiful of weather came sunny and calm, we went to hill and strand, we strolled everywhere as in childhood and the children enjoyed every minute, but alas, my Island looked sad and lonely for Eilish and everywhere brought lonely thoughts and memories. I set to work at home-cleaning and painting and white-washing for a whole week, also the new house where we slept, where you slept years ago, a nice comfortable room, I knitted and sew I was not a second idle. We visited the few houses left and we were very welcomed. The five new house on Blanban where Peg the Queen lived happily once are all closed up, only two houses inhabited on the top village; below our only seven inhabited houses.

We were very happy there. We went to the school-house every ~~xxx~~ evening to say the Rosary to the Blessed Virgin's Statue that's beautiful there, as well as any chapel in Ireland. The old desks brought me thoughts of long ago. We returned home and were glad to come to our mainland although we were lonely too f after them at home.

Galway County Council Archives



P R I E S T S

10.8.39. A priest is coming tomorrow to stay 3 or 4 weeks. He is from Dublin and was here twice before. He stays with Mary. He is the only visitor they had this year and is the last visitor to the Island this year. We will have a Mass every other day.

6.5.40. We had the stations here to-day, two canoes went for the Ballyferriter Priests and clerk and as the day was so lovely they stayed until near 4 o'clock in the evening. He says we are all very happy and contented here and other places with all the luxuries and everything they want are in the grip of death and agony with war and troubles and worries, some people are of course not all that.

Its a tiring day always but a very pleasant day in body and mind and soul, people are up very early, then few hours at school (that is where the services are held) and a few hours after school talking to the priests and watching them go is great fun but everything in the house is late and upside down this day as they did not say until yesterday they would come to-day until for that everything would be in readiness and they day would be more of a holiday. Another year will see many changes in the Island I am sure before they'll call in again.

22.8.41. I was rather busy as we always are this month, such as visitors coming in during the day and chatting until late hours and then a priest was staying a few days, confessions and Holy devotion and Mass which the Islanders are very interested indeed. Then the corn to bind. Thank God its over to-day. Then the bad weather to conquer everyone and all things.

H E R S E L F

15.5.38. I was glad to hear you enjoyed my last letter so well. of course it contained lots of news as I was well and happy myself that Sunday night I wrote to you. Wednesday after that I had the doctor about 3 o'clock and I was awful bad. So the best of news was or is spoilt and gone now again but thank God I am well again. I was in bed for ten days and in such lovely weather, it is turned out cold again these days.

27.5.38. I am very well again thank God, of course I wasn't only two months gone, so it was early and it bad enough.

26.9.38. How are you getting on these days in the factory of course locked up in comforts and in luxuries of life wherever you go, of course you were born to that and I was only made for Island's "Beautiful scenery" as you called the heavy seas that was beating the small Island outside the gravel strand that day we walked from Kearney's house out there.

The "Kerryman" is a godsend every Saturday and it goes around the Island during the week. From this now it is coming reading time, although I don't have much time I do like to have something nice to read sometimes some novels, its a nice change and I enjoy it.

10.12.38. I am cleaning up the house from morning till noon these days although the weather is very wet but I have a girl help with me.

12.12.38. The dresser is shined up nicely tonight too with the walls whitewashed, a nice fire under a fair light reading the Kerryman Christmas number and Illusts, and a short letter from you which came in altogether at 4 o'clock this evening.

17.1.39. I will miss my dear "Illust" of course as I am so inter-

ested in the Royal family now that I seem to know them all and I used enjoy seeing their pictures always. Everyone is charmed by the "Post" and think it better than the "Illusts" but I dare not tell anyone that they are not to come anymore. I hate to say that. It was too bad to tell them. Of course "Eilish of the Island" is expensive too mind you....

5.4.39. Now I will go on with your question. What are the Stooks of the Dead Woman? Wherever you saw are got this question? Answer - Her long teeth. Old women of long age used have very long teeth called stooks. Tell me if this is the right answer.

11.6.39. I am glad to hear you have everything ready for your coming holidays. I hope God you will enjoy them through. Maybe you would not see so much wonder as you saw on my tea-table last year a fish "dancing with his shadow."

10.8.39. Its about time I should write and tell you all the new of myself and the Island. As a matter of fact I was not as I should like to be with the last 4 or 5 weeks. I need a little holiday myself I think if I could have it. If I would have £4 or £5 to spend with myself near town for awhile. I would love to go out a few weeks I dare say but I must stay at home I am afraid for the want of the sum mentioned.

22.10.39. Well friend the year has stolen on again and we are once more close to the dreary season, anyway I don't mind storm or bad weather so much this year I think as there are worse things going on in other places. The year do not be long passing and I like this bit of it from now on until Christmas. I am always doing something reading or writing or knitting and am well pleased with the world so far thank God.

20.12.39. A week ago I received your parcel and indeed it was a wonderful one. You may be sure that everything was appreciated.

19.1.40. I am sorry to hear of the banning of "picture Post." its very sad to me it was all great fun and company so never mind maybe something else better will come along. I would never ban it myself on account of the lovely undressed ladies. I hope you will get me something weekly before long.

19.1.40. It is the coldest spell that came for years also here. Snow and frost. We are not able to do anything but sit around the fire warming ourselves I play the ball with Niam around the kitchen to keep us warm.

2.3.40. I am writing this letter for the same purpose that you should send me as soon as possible two pairs of shoes for I am out of shoes only a very worn pair which you sent me nearly two years ago before you came to the Island that Summer. If I buy a good pair in town they would cost 12/- or 15/- and indeed I may tell you the worse pair you sent me is far better than them. I trust you for you send me the right things alway when I ask you and any second-hand ones will do perfectly. I hope dear friend I am not worrying you or causing you any trouble and indeed I would not for the world have caused you any if I can but times are hard and its a thing with necissity and I am crazy after the good value I get from you at very little money when then they are very very good.

19.4.40. Your long forgotten letter came at last and indeed although it just struck me like a blow it also gave me the pleasure of knowing you are still well and alive. It pained me to read that there was no other reason with or cause with not writing but my own

last writing. Indeed it is not true I told you that I would not write again untill I would receive certain things. I think I only said I would not answer them questions until you would write and ~~ask~~ tell me you were to send me the shoes and it was of matter for putting you to write me early again. Indeed I was in need of them shoes and there was no other harm or thought in my heart but to tell you so, but dearest if I only thought it would give you so much displeasure as it did I would first rather walk out barefoot than tell you to send them. If I knew one word was written by me to give you any discomfort or worry or sorry I would rather give my hand out to anyone and say with heart and hand "Cut off two fingers of me before I would write and dissappoint G Chambers."

The parcel came yesterday and indeed it was just so and was my friend's talk and comfort but although I wanted them they did not bring any joy or pleasure to me like the very rest did for I knew from your letter you sent them in anger to me and with no pleasure to your own heart therefore I will just walk out naked and barefooted again or I may say I will suffer do it if I have to before I will ask you or trouble you with my parcel again.

6.5.40. I got your charming letter some time ago and indeed was glad to hear all being well again between us. Yes all cuts have been healed since and thank you for the nice letter it was so free and gay like years ago when there was no worry or war time.

Yesterday was a very wet Sunday and the girls were in to us, we were looking at the photo, myself and Mitchell and all and we had great fun at them.

10.5.40. I was more pleased than ever to hear from you as I am

always thinking of you these days and in what a great danger and trouble you must be. You may be sure nowadays that I am very anxious to hear you are well and safe but it discourages me to write at once when I am not in no hopes for an answer until quite a long time. Its a pity you don't write always a few words would do in a week's time anyway. Surely one hour would not rob you of life to sit down and tell an old friend Eilish that you are well and also happy so far as I hope God you are and all yours.

Of course I'll make a bed up for you whatever time you will come, I hope you will come in the day-time anyway, I will make it up in the corner of our house where the cradle is, a straw-bed like they used have <sup>in</sup> olden times. What a change!!!

29.6.40. After Dinner to-day which contained a nice fresh polluck and new potatoes and plenty milk, Niam and myself went out for a walk, I left John inside stretched back on the old couch reading the "Kerryman" after it just arriving as the post being the only boat outside to-day, that tells you the sea wasn't much to look at for Islanders although to you as always a beautiful scenery. We faced Barra na Traza - the top of the Gravel Strand but the White Strand was very nice and inviting and the top half covered with white dry sand and sun and from that another half stretched hard and carefree down to the sea where a few sea gulls stayed and the sea in and out washing their feet for them and they willingly stayed unmoved, Being it is holiday evening a few boys and girls were stretched together on the grassy bank of this Strand and when we arrived they came down to us and we had a lovely walk back

and forth walking near the water's edge talking and singing. Yes we enjoyed a good hour there. Niam was so gay and happy with no other companion so small as herself nor that does worry her until she is tired running away from us and then to us. Children and grown ups love the freedom of the Strand.

We enjoyed our tea also after coming home and Niam is off to the Land of Dreams, asleep since 7 o'clock with a small stick from the Strand in her hand which she loved to have from. I am sure you would like to walk on this Strand once more. So I hope God you will yet with Niam and E of the Island and Sally our dog and that Peace and sunshine and freedom by the sea will be yours yet with no grave thoughts to spoil happiness.

24.7.40. (They are staying with Mary on the Mainland) Nora Shea now Mrs Healy sent a note inviting us to their home which is very lovely, she has a lovely year old baby girl. She with her girl friend drove us in their car to Burnham where Niam was born and I was very pleased for as you know the weather was so wet and bad you could not stir any other way. She gave Niam a nice pair of Scandals and stockings and a pinafore. Niam brought a cup and saucer to their baby. We spent a nice evening there.

I sat in the bed where Niam was born. It may be lucky again....

30.10.40. I was shocked at hearing of what became or nearly fell so near your house since. Thank God you were safe and also your dear house which I hope you'll never see in ruins. I pity you being all alone during Winter, I mean in your own house but I know of men who are more lonely and have to live alone through all their lives, who never had the joy of sharing one day of family life and has never now any chance of tasting that joy. Of course

you are more happier than these people and you have lots of past happiness to live on awhile, the wireless put on, books and mags to read and some work to do.

25.12.40. Christmas Day. As I am so contented near the turf fire this Holy Night I think I shall drop you a few lines telling you of all happenings of the day. But I must tell you of interesting things first. Last Saturday I received a perfect parcel from Dublin and to my surprise when opening it found an envelope written on it was "From George Chambers, London." You may be sure I was delighted with its contents. I was so glad it was from you. Indeed I wasn't thinking of any such thing this Christmas from you but even a letter telling me you were well and happy would bring me happiness this season and indeed you are too good to have anything happen to you and God is very good to us all and may he keep you and yours from any harm throughout the New Year. But I was not happy after receiving these as I had not a letter from your own hand but thank God I got my wish last night Christmas Eve 6 p. m. When the postman brought in a letter from G. Chambers to me. You may be sure I enjoyed it after my tea. Also John read it and re-read it. He said it was very interesting.

18.4.41. You were really feeling disgusted in your last letter but I hope that have passed on as every trouble do as time heals every wound, and surely you are not too old to care nor you will not be even if it goes on for years yet to come. I hope and pray you will live through it and will enjoy life's joys years after it that is I call a family gathering together, with children and grandchildren growing and grown.

24.9.41. To-day Sunday 6 canoes are at Mass and the day is lovely



also was yesterday and the day before. After Dinner which to-day contains Potatoes and fresh brains and milk I will be just like the "grey woman opposite" as the "Islandman" says, we will go down watching the canoes coming in and that is a great pleasure to me, and then the rest of the evening off to the Strand or down on the White Strand. Even the sweets are not to be got in Dunquin these days. So the next time you will come around it is to me instead of Niam you will be giving the lovely sweet for to put me smiling taking the photo. I don't know about books being rationed nor I don't even care for I never bought one.

25.11.41. You have got another Islander already over there that is Barbara Mullen, good luck to her. I too would like to sit down with ye and enjoy a good mug of tea with you for indeed tea is a great luxury here these days. Instead there is some kind of coffee which many people do not like but the flour is plentiful again.

4.4.42. So now you will have 147 of my letters. I hope you will burn them all soon unto a nice fire, of course nothing else will ever come of them. If they wereworth anything I have it got long ago an answer to each of them. Surely I'll always write to you wherever I'll move or whatever way things will turn, but when I leave the Island you may not be interested in hearing the Mainland history. Anyway you would be too much at ease if I were not asking you of anything in any letter, I know I have written at least 30 half crazy letters during my time of writing and surely they are the ones that you like best.

27.6.42. I hope Veronica is well as usual and also Geoffrey's wife from the bee stung. I would like to be in the garden with you eating honey - a honey party in the garden - maybe that's a new idea to you

then if you were here I would give you at least one egg a day.

8.9.42. Your letter to-day just reached me and honestly it was as welcome as if it was yourself that came. I am overjoyed to hear from you once again dear friend. Thank God you are alive and well and all yours. Your letter was your first one to my Island home not finding Eilish before it alas, alas, and your last one addressed Blaskets. Never mind, God is good and one day yet will dawn when G. Chambers will come around and we'll all stroll in there where mother will be waiting and anxious to meet us all together. Thanks ever so much for getting so much pains in getting permission for the tobacco which John is dying to get. He goes out net fishing and mackrel cost 12/ hd last night he had 14 hd. and that was the biggest lot he got since the price went high. So the tobacco is very scarce and he smokes a lot when he is out all night and it will be a God send.

6.11.42. I am glad to say the tobacco arrived safely a few days ago. Thanks ever so much but it is a pity it was so dear to you and then to us as the duty was 6/5 after you paying 3/4 postage and all, image that much together for 4 ozs tobacco. It was out of the way entirely and it will not happen again. Never mind it was worth it in a way for it gave the pleasure that my dear friend lived so far and ~~xxxx~~ received my last letter to you.

14.1.43. Would you believe now that to-night Saturday night is my third night at this letter and some one comes in and disturbs me which I do not like to do as I do have great desire to finish it off once I have started, but I understand that these people if I'd visit their homes would be too glad to have I called and would at once throw away such a job.

None of my brothers did get married yet, like the others, no thought of that as far as I know and see.

## W A K E S.

When there is a dead man on Blaskets everybody is frightened, anyway the children and nearly grownups also.

If he is an old man it will be a funny night of course. Another man will be telling stories, fairy tales, and young people will be throwing bits of clay pipes on one another and them sort of sport. But of course when there is a young person there are no fun at all.

There is a boreen here and we call it the "Boreen of the Dead", and wherever place the coffin is taken out it will come all the way and down through this road or boreen.

All the canoes here go in the funeral and the canoe with the coffin will be the first and the rest after it then. Also women and young girls go, one in every canoe nearly, sometimes.

Some of the people are buried in Dunquin others in Ventry.

I was on a wake since. Here an old man died unexpected last Sunday. He went to bed Saturday night good enough and was dying in the morning. He was dead altogether then about 4 o'clock Sunday evening. He was seventy years of age. He lived with his sister in one of the cottages, the new ones.

Then Sunday evening they went out for the coffin and wake. Pats Kearney and two other men. They went to town that night (i. e. Ring Dingle, some ten miles from the small village of Dunquin), there was also a woman in the car, they most always have a woman from Dunquin, I don't understand why a woman has to go, it is superstitious to have her with them at all you know.

They brought the coffin in a motor car or lorry I think to Dunquin.

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It was too late then to come in that night. It was also rather bad so they came in Monday evening and indeed it was not fine at all.

The dead body was inside Monday night as it was too bad and too late.

All the Islanders were gathered in the house the two nights. I was there myself the first night. The body was laid out on the bed and was very nice to look on. On the floor of the room we were sitting ( all the girls and a couple of old women ). It was a funny night to us. Telling stories and everything to shorten the night. I told them "The Queen who flew." It was very nice I like it very much. At twelve o'clock we all kneeled down in the room and also the people in the kitchen and we said the Rosary. It was delightful. We had tea then about two o'clock. Tea and bread and jam. It wasn't so plentiful you know because as the Wake didn't come that night. We were there until eight in the morning and then we went home. We did not go to sleep at all but I was not there the second night but to twelve o'clock.

It went on as the night before. He was put into the coffin then at twelve o'clock, then the old women cried on him, in Irish we call that cry "Clozón." Well I don't think the old women have any special words keening over the body, one may say "May God rest your soul in Heaven," "May God take your soul," and so on, then to say "Our Father" or "Hail Mary." That is a custom here.

Tuesday evening he was buried. When the coffin was taken out all things that's used about the corp are also taken outside the house. Four chairs are under the coffin then and they cried again. The coffin was taken down to the canoe on the shoulders of four men. The day was

very bad and only two boats went out. The one with the corp and another one. They came home yesterday evening.

Also a child died, three months old. He was buried the same day in our Temple. ( That is a patch of unconsecrated ground on the edge of a cliff.)

A neighbour has just come in, I hear him saying that another old ~~man~~ man will soon be dead again. He is very bad unless he'll get any way better again. I hope he will because I'll tell you. Since the 'Shea man died we are afraid to stir any night unless three or four of us together. We believe in fairies here that's why we are so interested in fairy tales. If you were to see the children when there is someone dead here, honestl, they nearly die themselves when they see him. Everyone is frightened untill he is buried a month or so. Jerry Shea was from the top of the village but this man is nearer to us down here so I hope he won't die so soon. Do you be afraid of fairies yourself. (I think Eilish means ghosts here.)

With two more girls and myself we visited the sick man's house. He is John Dunleary, my Godmother's husband. He was very weak last night but he is better again to-day. Two old women also were there. If you were to see them indeed it was not the sick man that was troubling them anyway, smoking their pipes and chatting away then like geese. Talking of their own troubles which they got through life. I enjoyed the night listening to them. Everyone telling something strange always. Anyway I pitied Mary Pats, a widow, telling her own. The story is like this:- "Oh the Lord Save us then I didn't expect Mike's death atall, I did not then. Mary Mother he went out that morning as happy and good-looking as he ever went out since I first saw him. He told me to tell the children to get up. Indeed (May he rest in peace)

he used always think of them. He was always anxious about them untill he went away altogether from them. He went back to the strand himself and was carrying some weed to the field. It was Spring time, six~~x~~ years this Spring, in April you know. Well to make a long story short he came in the door to me that evening and a Mike you never since walked in or out to me untill you were taken out in your coffin a couple of days afterwards. Fine and young and strong he was, indeed it is now I miss him when the children are seperating, but we must be satisfied with God's Will. I hope he is in a better place. It was double phenumonia he had."

Poor woman after telling that much she was rubbing her apron to her eyes about ten minutes or so. Then they all used do the same. She stirred them all.

"Gobna<sup>at</sup>" came in after a while, a nice young and jolly woman and she was telling stories and funny things about herself when she was a girl. She is not from the Island but she is married here. She was once wearing pearls in her ears, she showed us the small holes in them yet. We laughed at her. She is poor now the creature with eight or nine~~x~~ children. But still she is a nice woman.

<sup>a</sup> It was on a wake here, John Dunleary, the man that was sick a spell died eary yesterday morning. May his soul R. I. P. Amen. The day was as fine as it could be. His eldest son and wife and two more boys went out early for the wake. They had a motor car to town, only two of them went there and the two boys went to Ballyferriter to tell the Parish Priest to be in the funeral. The son and his wife in town hired a motor lorry that brought the coffin and other parcels and bags too, including two bags of white bread and a good amount of jam, a box of clay pipes and a few bottles of whiskey, also a half barrel

of porter. The wake was here at half of six yesterday evening. The dead body was laid on his bed with his own new suit on him, only his cap and boots as you know yourself ~~and he was very nice looking.~~ Everyone on the Island came to see him and said a prayer with his poor soul, only the small children because they they would be afraid of him you see. The old people here say that if you would touch his hand or forehead when dead, that you would never again be anything afraid of him to see him or anything, and this we all did. I felt his hand, dear me, he was as cold as ice.

Two more canoes came in from the mainland, relatives and friends came from far and near. The house was crowded. We stayed there until eight this morning. We spent the night happily. A spell around the fire, a spell below in the corp's room, everybody deeply interested in the shadow of death. To the sick man it brought peace and rest, to his poor wife, it has left her a lonely widow, with her only comfort in life, her only son and daughter far far away from her. She wished they were nigh their father's side this houe anyway. But God help us they were too far away from him. You know the married man in the house is her step-son and there is also a brother of him there a widower.

The funeral is gone out to-day. It went at half past nine though no one suspected it to go untill twelve or half twelve, but they always depend on the weather here. The storm was beginning early in the morning and they got everything ready as soon as possible. Five canoes went out with the canoe with the coffin. They were just landed outside when the wind blew terrible and none of them came to-day. Poor people and they don't like to stay outside like that.

Sixteen canoes with the one with the dead body is usually the

funeral at sea from Blaskets to Dunquin and that is a sight the Islanders don't easily forget afterwards.

A woman died in the Island a week ago, last Monday night amidst a terrible weather. The corp was in for three nights, the wake came that night and she was buried the fourth day. May God rest her soul, Amen. The Island was in a very bad state as it looked as if a long storm would come, but God is merciful and showed it to us, by calming it down at sea. All the Islanders were up the three nights and they were just thinking of making a coffin themselves and then take the corp to Dunquin any time suitable for going. Her husband had a good hope and told them he would wait another night, so the third day was fine enough to go for the wake and next day was beautiful for the funeral.

I hope it will be long again before we'll have another wake on our dear Island.

Yes, that was the "Temple" I meant because grown-ups are there too you see. Years ago when people used die in bad weather here they were buried ~~here~~ there. I don't remember anyone buried there lately. My grandmother died five or six years ago. It was Christmas time and the weather was fiercerly bad. What was done I'll tell you. They made the coffin themselves, after a few days and then she was put into it for another day or two and was left in her room until a fine day came. She was taken out then and buried in Dunquin.

People don't die so often here you know as other places, thank the Lord nowadays they get the chance of burying always.

Well if a person would get sick here and that he'd be getting worse and feared to die they would go out to Dunquin, and then to town for a doctor and a priest, but very seldom they do be called,



thank God for it, because seldom anyone is badly sick and it is also very expensive. There is no one else to see to our sickness only to remove the patient to the hospital if he isn't getting any better in a long time.

There is a midwife here too when she is wanted. It is a nature's gift she has. The government is not paying her either, only the patients will give her a few shillings.

Galway County Council Archives

THE AFFAIR OF THE PUFFINS. 2

At this same time when the young gannets were "preserved", there were other birds in the neighbourhood of the Blaskets which were preserved and watched in the same way, the Islanders were forbidden to take a single one of them away with them. These birds were in the Teeraught in the season, and their young are called fuipini (puffins), and, though the young gannets are remarkable for fat, the young puffins have the better of them in their own qualities, though a young gannet would certainly weigh as much as six of the puffins. A lady in Dingle had the lease of these Islands and she had people to look after them and after all her affairs, driving off stock wherever they could find it, and whatever the character of the lady was, her drivers were a thoroughly bad lot. It's my feeling that nobody takes up with that trade, but the very worst of men.

Well, they proclaimed the puffins, and whenever they found that they were matured and ready for killing, this lady used to send hunters of her own people to kill them throughout a whole fortnight. They took food with them and the sort of cask into which butter used to be put a while ago. A boat would put them over to the Island and when it was thought likely that their chase was finished, the same boat would go again to fetch them. There is landing-place in the Teeraught called Cask Harbour and, though there are two other landing-places besides in which people could be put on shore, they never would take up a cask anywhere else but in this creek that is still called Cask Harbour and which will always be called so, though nobody remembers seeing any of these casks for sixty years now, though their father recalled them well

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enough, for they used to fetch these casks when they were filled and the lady used to send them orders to go there, though they never got a single bird to eat.

She would carry off the birds to a house she had in Fermoy Parish - she had a lot of labourers, a big farm, cows and milk, boys and girls, and whenever they had some forty of these casks by them, they had something to eat with their potatoes for a good while, for she couldn't give her workpeople anything they likes better for kitchen than these birds.

Things went on like this for many years, while before this, there had been no preservation, and the Islanders had always found them a great stand-by, they liked them just as much as a lump of fat pork. They were sore and angry, just like the boat's crew from Dunquin, and one day two boats started off at the night's end, two seine-net boats, but they took no nets with them this day, for they weren't after fish, but young puffins. There were eight men in each boat, stripped to the shirt, and off they went rowing like mad, racing one another, bent on making a mess of the rock before the guards coul come in their rage, whoever would have to pay for it.

Well, so it happened. One man stayed behind in charge of each boat, and fourteen of them went up the rock. These men who had left their home in a passion for the purpose ravaged and ransacked the rock, they began at the edge as soon as they left the boat, and went straight ahead, ravaging and ransacking till they reached the other side in the late evening. Never was there anything seen like the ruin they made all day till evening and I give you my word that there were few enough of the young puffins

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left for the other collectors when they should think it time to go to fetch them. They were gathering them up to take to the boats in bundles tied together with cords. They had a fair load of them in the boats and, when they were ready, they started off homewards. But they didn't get home unobserved, for the evening was freshening up for storm, they got back damp and chilled, and who should be waiting for them in the Island but the keeper who had the charge of the rock. And the boats took so much time making the harbour that everybody saw them coming, and, when the keeper saw and heard where they had been, he very nearly had to be tied up, for he went clean out of his wits, seeing the big boats full of the birds, and he had been sent that very day to arrange for hunting them the next week with orders to take anyone he liked with him, they were to be ready for him, he was going ashore the next day and would be back as soon as he could secure some food and a load of casks. All this was spoilt for him now and no wonder he was sore, as indeed he was. He was afraid that his mistress - Betty Rice was her name - would not be best pleased with him.

He cursed the men in the boat viciously and swore by the iron book that it would be his own fault if any of them had possessed in his own house for a year and a day to come. It happened most unluckily that this was just the time that the poet O Dunlevy's blackfaced sheep had been killed and eaten, for the people who had killed and eaten the sheep were in luck's way and hadn't needed to go hunting puffins to get kitchen for their dinner.

So the keeper and the poet were both of them after the Islanders at this time. The rascals who had stolen the sheep thought that it was a hanging matter for the puffin thieves and, so they imagined,

there was nothing against themselves, for nothing was known at this time, though the poet was burrowing and searching about unknown to them. The keeper went ashore, and the people there hardly knew him, his whole aspect was so changed, his eyes were staring, he would give no answer to anybody who addressed him on road or byway, and he wasn't walking step by step, but trotting along like an old horse in his haste to reach Dingle and tell his mistress; he imagined that she had no need to take up any point of law against them, he thought that she was so great a lady that there was nothing to prevent her taking a rope, twisting it round all their necks and hanging them up herself. He was brought up very short when she told him that they would have to put them to the law. He told her there was no need of that, for she might be sure that, when fourteen hunters had been on a rock from morning to night without stopping to take breath, that they had made hay of the neck and left no hope of puffins behind them and, if it was not in her power to put them in some place that would hold them, she would never see a puffin again all her life long. She asked him would they be able to go catching them for themselves on any day to come. No, said he, nor in this year at all, for he himself had seen those two great boats full up to the chin and he was inclined to believe that all the puffins they had left behind them on the rock wouldn't fill a coatpocket. This sent the lady into a terrible rage, for she had thought that the keeper was talking big and that things were not half as bad as he pretended, and that, even if they had gone on the rock, she imagined they had only taken a small handful of the birds and by no possibility could they have taken so much that no

kitchen was left for her servants; but, when she heard that things were quite the other way and that none of her men could go catching them that year again according to the keeper's report, you'd need to tie up a person more in possession of their wits than she was. She told him to go home, that she herself would have the law of them, and, since he had seen them with the loot with his own eyes, she would certainly put them in a place that would hold them: she was pretty sure that not a man of them would be in his own house by the time the next puffins were mature in a year's time, she would put in the charge against them every single piece of meat that she gave her servants for "kitchen" for a year and a day and they would undoubtedly have to pay for that, for, if ever her servants had wanted meat, they wouldn't lack it now, for she was convinced that the Islanders would have to pay for it, since they hadn't left them their own property, it was a great loss to her, upwards of forty firkins of cured puffins that she usually had from the rock, and now according to the keeper's story they would have to get along without them. So she told him to go home, they would have to wait a bit, as the quarter sessions were not near yet, but she would know it well enough when they came. Off home went the keeper and later on when the time to serve the writ drew near she sent for him again to put down the names of the men who had been in the chase. Off he went and never stopped a minute till he reached Dingle, and he was the very man to set down the name of every one of them, for he was well acquainted with them, having seen them often before.

Soon after the summonses came and they weren't best pleased at that. They said to one another that they fancied they would never kill a single puffin again. From that time on they were very uncomfortable till the time was up and they had to leave the Island and go to the trial at the Court in Tralee.

There is always a fascination in reaching the utmost limit of things and it was this that prompted me to find the Edge of the Old World.

It was easy enough to find the spot, I had only to lay a ruler across a school atlas to discover that Sleah Head in County Kerry was to be my objective, but as beyond the Head lay the island of Blasket and beyond that the Tearacht with a lighthouse that also had its tiny complement of mortals I decided that I must set foot on that remote rock.

To visit a lighthouse was not such an easy matter as I had imagined, I wrote to the head-keeper who advised me to make Blasket Island my base and wait on a favourable day for the fisherfolk to take me out to the Rock.

As my knowledge of Blasket was limited to a Bartholomew map that only showed "school" I wrote there and received a charming letter from the mistress giving full particulars of the route and fixing up a place where I could stay.

So, in due course, I found myself at Dingle, where the rail ends and where a motor was waiting to take me the next twelve miles along a rough but lovely coast road round Sleah Head - passing on its way the well-preserved remains of a curious bee-hive village as we rounded the point and faced the open Atlantic, on the high rugged cliffs was the most westerly point of Ireland, below and three miles out to sea was the Blasket and still farther west the Tearacht Rock.

There was one place in the cliffs where steps had been cut

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that led down to a small jetty; I made my way down and shortly afterwards I observed my boat coming in from the direction of the island. I was surprised to notice the curious way in which it stood out of the water and still more surprised to find on closer inspection that it was made of tarred canvas stretched over a framework of lath. I had some doubt about trusting myself to such a frail shell, but once aboard and lying down on the bottom - for it is only the rowers who are provided with seats - I found it a most comfortable mode of travelling for the body follows exactly the motion of the waves and there is no jolting as happens when sitting on a raised seat.

Only one of my four boatmen knew any English and very soon the eight oars were keeping time to a Gaelic song. The morning was sunny with a brisk wind and I had a wonderful feeling of exhilaration as I turned my back on Kerry and we set our course for the unknown island of Blasket.

The panorama of mountains, islands and sea was indescribably beautiful, from Mount Brandon round to the mountains of Valencia it was one lovely sweep of blues and purples, while a little to the west of Valencia was that strange group of rocks known as the Skelligs, once the home of eccentric hermits, looking more like the legendary Flying Dutchman than solid rock. Blasket, too, seemed to hold some mystery, it is three and a half miles long, little more than half a mile wide, yet it rises to close on nine hundred feet! It is attended by some half a dozen lesser islands, all of like curious aspect.

It was here, in the autumn of that memorable year 1588, that a fleeing remnant of the Armada put in for shelter, two of the



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ships regained the open sea but the third, Our Lady of the Rosary, was lost with all hands save one small lad.

As we came into the landing cove of the Island I could not, at first, make out what appeared to be a procession of huge black-beetles crawling up a narrow path, on closer inspection they turned out to be canvas canoes; these are so frail that it is necessary to take them straight out of the water, turn them over and place on stout steaks; this is the only type of boat used, they are all about sixteen feet long, well shaped with lifting bows and a square stern, the oars used are very long, about two inches thick and practically bladeless.

Every house on the island is collected into the one village which is situated at the landward end where the island has the appearance of having been scooped out for this particular purpose. There were no roads but merely rough paths, in places level with the low roof of the house beneath. Between the best and worse house there was little to choose, perhaps the few houses built by the late government were a shade more imposing as they had been put up without regard to convenience on windy and unsheltered spots but as there is neither priest, doctor nor policeman so there is nothing in the cabins to suggest that any one islander is better than another; even the school that had been signalled out by Mr Bartholomew as worthy of notice was no more than one large room and differed only from the other cabins by having an extra window.

I was lodged in one of the government-built houses, it had two rooms downstairs, a small one that served for my bedroom and a larger one that was kitchen and general living room for us all, from it a flight of stairs ran up to a space under the roof and

this provided seating accomodation for any number of casual callers who seemed to be dropping in at all hours of the day and late evening; as far as I could discover the whole family, consisting of some seven adults and one or two children, must have slept in the low loft under the roof.

The only fuel used on the island is peat and the cooking arrangements were very primitive, our house only possessed two utensils, a huge iron kettle and a large shallow pot with a lid in which practically everything was cooked, bread was baked in it, for this live embers were piled on the lid. Crab-claws roasted in the fire were a great favourite with the islanders but the great stand-by was potatoes, each day a huge pile were boiled in their jackets and turned out on the middle of the table. Most families had their own cow so that there was a plentiful supply of milk and as fishing is the only industry there was generally some fish to be had.

I found the islanders exceptionally charming and friendly and many of them seem to have a definite literary bent, each house has one single door which always stood open and anyone was welcome to enter, the same friendliness extended to the animals, for dogs, ducks, chickens, lambs and donkeys were forever walking in and being shoo-ed out by the family or given a place by the fire. The floors were the bare earth and it was the duty of one of the children to bring up from the strand a sack of sand every evening and keep the floor of the cabin sweet and clean throughout the day.

Standing on the crest of this island it was easy to feel that this was indeed the far end and limit of the inhabited world

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Unfortunately the weather took a turn for the worse but apparently it had been decided that fine or otherwise we were to attempt a visit to the Tearacht on Sunday - that being the only day the schoolmistress was free, but Sunday came with a fine misty rain and a high wind, no boat ventured out to the mainland for Mass, but as my friend was set on going and our crew were prepared to risk it we all went down to the slip where we found another charming Island girl who was anxious to join in the adventure. A canoe was taken off its rests, turned over into the water and with the four boatmen, each pulling two oars, and the two girls, we started.

The first four miles lay under the lee of the island where it was comparatively sheltered and the cliffs rose sheer out of the sea and although in many cases there was a heavy swell our light boat rode over the waves as easily as a seagull and I had the same feeling of comfort that I had experienced in crossing. It was when we came out into the open Atlantic that I realised what a wild day it really was, banks of sea mist very soon shut out the island we were leaving and all signs of any other land or rocks. Nothing could be seen but the long lines of rollers like little hills with deep valleys running between, our light boat lifted its prow well out of the water as it came to the summit of these hills but came down into the trough with a sickening thud and I could not help speculating on what would happen if the canvas should split! Most of the time my boatmen were chanting Gaelic songs but when we were about halfway there was a long confabulation and I was informed that they were very doubtful about the wisdom of proceeding; thinking they might be

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anxious about their fee I hastened to assure them that they might consider that already well earned and if they thought it advisable to return to do so. However, after some further talk they decided to go on although I was assured that it would be impossible to land on the Rock in that sea.

Soon after this the mist began to lift and we had our first view of the curious pyramidal rock on which the lighthouse is built. At all points the rock drops steeply into the sea while above it rises to an apex seven hundred feet high. We skirted the Rock until we came to a deep indentation on the south side, this terminated in a tunnel that went clean through to the other side. At the side of this bay there was a tiny jetty with steps running down the side, while many hundred feet above we could see the keepers quarters. We pulled into this little bay and though we shouted together, time after time, at the top of our voices, there was such a turmoil of waters that it was impossible for our voices to be heard above the din. To attempt to land on the steps of the jetty would have been suicide, but at the side there was a lower and disused one covered thickly with seaweed, we backed in to this and as the waves lifted our boat one of the men made a great jump and landed safely. He then went up the four hundred odd steps to the men's quarters and in a very few minutes we were overjoyed to see four keepers, each with a great coil of rope, coming down to us. Landing on the steps of the jetty was no easy matter but with the help of the ropes and willing hands we managed it without mishap. Two men had to be left in the boat, otherwise it would have been dashed to pieces on the rocks.

We had a particularly hearty welcome, which is not surpris-

ing when it is mentioned that this lighthouse does not see more than <sup>6</sup> one genuine visitor in two years and they certainly did not expect to see two girls on that Sunday! A feast was prepared, musical instruments brought out and an impromptu dance was soon enlivening the monotony of lighthouse life. While this was going on I was taken over the Rock by the headkeeper. The light is some twohundred feet above the sea and is often the last glimpse an emigrant has of his native Erin.

Here we were actually standing on the extreme Edge of the Old World and I thought of all the ships that had passed that point in the old days and with what different thoughts and hopes and fears, not knowing what might lie beyond that far horizon, and I thought of how much the world had lost in the loss of that mystery.

As may be imagined the keepers were very reluctant to let us go particularly the girls! but no chances can be taken with the sea so about the middle of the afternoon we descended the long flight of steps cut in the face of the Rock. By now the sea had considerably calmed down but getting back into the boat was far more tricky than getting out, it is one thing to jump out of a canvas boat on to solid rock but something quite different to jump from the same solid rock into a frail canvas boat that is bobbing up and down, anyway we managed it and my last recollection of the Tearacht is of the four keepers standing on the little jetty waving farewell.

The two girls will long remember that day for no woman from the island had previously visited the Rock.

The dark cliff towered up to the stars that flickered  
And seemed no more than lights upon its brow,  
And on the slippery quay  
Men talked - a rush of Gaelic never-ending.  
I stepped down to the boat,  
A frail skin rocking on the unquiet water,  
And at a touch she trembled  
And skimmed out lightly to the moonlit seaway.  
I lying in the stern  
Felt all the tremble of water slipping under,  
As wave on wave lifted and let us down.  
The water from the oars dripped fiery; burning  
With a dull glow great globes  
Followed the travelling blades. A voice rose singing  
To the tune of the running water and loud oars:  
"I met a maiden in the misty morning,  
And she barefooted under rippling tresses,  
I asked her, was she Helen, was she Deirdre?  
She answered: 'I am none of these, but Ireland.  
Men have died for me, men have still to die.'"  
The voice died then and, growing in the darkness,  
The shape of the Great Island  
Rose up out of the water hugely glooming,  
And wearing lights like stars upon its brow.

( Robin Flower. )

It is an odd and happy coincidence that within two years the sparsely populated Blasket Islands should have produced two books of whose quality and charm there can be no question. Maurice O'Sullivan's *Twenty Years A-Growing* and O'Crohan's *The Islandman* have been written wholly independently of one another, and indeed O'Crohan had written his book before *Twenty Years A-Growing* appeared. O'Crohan, in contrast to O'Sullivan, is an elderly man, and has, in consequence, a greater wealth of experience from which to draw; and as a picture of life on the Blaskets *The Islandman* is magnificent.

The anecdotes of fishing exploits, of storms at sea, of seal-hunting in caves, of home life, and of drunken frolics on the mainland are superbly told, and occasionally O'Crohan mentions a detail which O'Sullivan's more poetic nature would not have dealt with, which stamps a complete and realistic picture on the reader's mind. The two books, in fact, are complementary.

Every reader who enjoyed O'Sullivan will equally enjoy O'Crohan; while as a first introduction to the Blaskets this book is delicious.

TWENTY YEARS A-GROWING: Cheap Edition 5<sup>s</sup><sub>net</sub>.

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Ó CROHAN

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