

Irish Benedict Society Hx '31/32

One of the great minds of the 19th Century said: "The devil has never had a chance: God has written all the books".

Now the Irishman, in this respect, is the devil. Especially in N. S. I used to think that a few Scotchmen lived in Scotland. But in the last few months I've learned that my earlier belief was entirely wrong. Scotland is a mere geographical expression, a legend. Being born in Scotland is nothing. But being born in Pictou County, three generations ago, of Scottish parents, - that's the real thing.

Go to Scotland today, and look for oatmeal bannock, brose, haggis, whisky, marmalade, finnan haddie, and they laugh at you, and refer you to Halifax, N. S. You can travel everywhere in Scotland, and tune your ear for Gaelic, but the only place you can actually hear Gaelic is in Antigonish, N. S. and Kincardie, Ontario. It reminds me of the expression: "being more Catholic than the Pope". Scotland never was as Scotch as Nova Scotia.

And so I say the devil, I mean the Irishman, has never had a chance, because the Scotchman, or God, has written all the books.

My confusion of the Scotchman and God springs from a story which I heard in my youth, and which has made a great impression on me. A Toronto boy one day came home and related to his father that he had heard a terrible thing said, viz, that Jesus was a Jew. "But so he was, my son", "Welly said the boy thoughtfully, "I never knew that, of course I knew that God was a Presbyterian minister."

Well now, you have done me the honour to ask me to reply to the Poast "Educational Institutions". That gives me an opportunity to say something which is very much in my mind at the present time. What does the community expect of its educational institutions? The thing I hear most often, from the outside, is this: "We expect that you educators will give us leaders" What sort of leaders then - leaders in wars and business? Partly perhaps, but the request for leadership generally means, I believe, leadership and guidance in thought and morals and politics. Certainly I have often heard the need for this sort of leadership stressed, and I have never heard it denied.

Very good. Leadership implies a willingness to be led, guidance means followers. Now what has the world done with its leaders ever since the War? Aside altogether from justice, and honour and political wisdom, the world was told that the application of the Versailles Treaty was economically impossible, and that the attempt to apply it would lead to economic catastrophe and the greatest social disorders. It may be replied that the victors were in a feverish mood, and hardly capable of listening to economists. But in the years that followed the economists step by step were proved right, until no well-educated man could fail to see the correctness of their reasoning. Again, no serious student of history, to say nothing of the economists, believed that the U. S. could corner the world's gold supply without disaster to its own industry and commerce. It will not do for the politicians now to say, "Oh these tiresome academic people are wise after the event, just like the rest of us." That will not do, for there are literally hundreds of books, and thousands of speeches and articles, written long before the event, which predicted all too accurately the precise course events have taken. Nor is it true

that the academic leaders have been too abstract, too philosophic for common men to understand. Rather it was the other way on, - the philosophers talked plain sense, and senseless people attempted to talk philosophy. The leaders have been with us, but they have had no followers.

Now before I leave the subject of economics will you permit me to say that some of the best economic thinking in the last two centuries has been done in the city of Dublin? It was a Dublin economist in the 18th Century who formulated the principle that the profits of trade vary inversely as the distance over which the trade is conducted. You may say: "Well, that surely is abstract with a vengeance". But sit down for a moment with a map showing the density of population in the U. S. and Canada and think over it. What does it mean? It means that the great bulk of American trade must be self-contained, whereas the great bulk of ours must be foreign trade. Consider then the folly of our imitating American trade policy. Think of it. An Irishman living two centuries ago, who knew more about us today than some of us know about ourselves. And there is still living in Dublin a man who knows so much of agricultural economics that Canadian departments of agriculture ought to be sitting at his feet, studying what he says.

But this is economics merely. And economics is not the most important part of life and civilisation. There is another and more serious side of life and civilisation in which educated men have been lifting up their voices in vain. It is in short whether life is to be materialistic only, in this our generation. If it is, then educated men see no hope for the next generation, nor for civilisation. Materialism is sterile. The historian knows that that is so. The philosopher even knows why it is so. But we have on this continent a materialism in outlook, a materialism in purpose, a materialism in valuation, which has grown more and more extreme. One could illustrate this in a hundred ways, but let one illustration suffice. A school, not 1000 miles away, arranged a few years ago to have the hour 3 - 4 on Friday afternoons turned over to one of the most accomplished of Canadian musicians. This by the way cost the school nothing in money. The musician used the hour to give talks, illustrated by their music, on some of the great musicians. Will you believe that the school board intervened, and cut the arrangement short on the ground that the children were learning nothing useful, and that an hour of their week was being wasted!

Now of course a generation that will talk in this way about music will talk insanely about science. Listen next time you hear science mentioned, and twenty chances to one, you will hear it described as useful. But the true scientist is not a man who can mend a telephone, or explain a carburetor, or dynamo. He is intent rather on using the intellect God has given him to understand the world God has made. Science, in the strict sense, is no more useful than music or poetry, and the materialism of this continent threatens to destroy science as it threatens to destroy every grace of life.

I say this to Irishmen in particular because the Irish are, and always have been, in this American sense, a useless people. Useless, but not graceless. Musical, Poetical, eloquent, witty, chivalrous to women, the Irish have been a civilising force, since the dawn of their history. But they have never been useful for anything except to pull the leg of other Europeans when other Europeans

became too serious. There is a story in an old Latin writer, Pomponius Mela, to show that the Irish pulled the legs of the Romans. This writer sets it down as a fact that the grass in Ireland was so rich that if a cow were allowed to pasture more than a short time in the day she would fill up with milk till she burst. You have heard a lot before about Irish bulls, but there is the Irish cow as she appears in Latin literature.

This then is what I have to say in conclusion about our educational institutions, to you who are not materialists. Educational institutions are the facilities provided by a civilised people so that civilisation may continue among their children and children's children. They are not aimed, and should not be aimed, to create a world where some people or some classes of society shall have money, and power. Money and power there will always be, but they are not the aim of educational institutions.