

The Dublin Man

There is a very rare creature called the king penguin. Advisedly I call it a creature because I do not know whether it is a fowl, a fish, or an animal: I am, however, in possession of the little-known fact that a spider is not an insect, but an animal.

Apparently changing the subject, I come to the statement so often made by Dublin statesmen that there is no foundation for the Belfast idea that there are two nations in Ireland and that therefore partition is justified. The two-nation idea is certainly false, but for this reason – that there are several nations in this country. You have, for example, a parcel of Cromwellian blackguards down south; they are called Yellabellies, otherwise Wexfordmen. Further south you have a settlement of iron-faced pigmies endowed with unearthly cuteness; these are called Kerry-men. Who could mistake a Galwayman for anything else? Indeed, I know certain Irish families which contain members of quite dissimilar nations, and all usually at war with one another. I hold, however, that Ireland's king penguin is the Dublin Man. I wish to attempt an analysis of this unique character and from time to time will endeavour to disclose to shrewder readers his more pronounced characteristics. These are embedded in the language he speaks, so that one may study him phrase by phrase. Today's phrase is

I WOULDN'T MIND ONLY.

Let us suppose you go into a pub. He is sitting behind a pint reading a newspaper. The pint is ignored – a portentous symptom.

Perhaps I should here digress to state this subtle concept in the abstract. The Dublin Man has no great objection to outrage on the part of other persons against himself. Immense outrage is accepted not so much with fortitude as with an air of weary disdain. He accepts tragedy as an unavoidable fundamental. What he will *under no circum-*

stances tolerate is a hostile gesture, however harmless, *that is gratuitous*. His intimate concern is with manners. Kill him – yes. That is to be expected. For all he knows you have a good reason. The instinct to kill is orderly and natural. He accepts it. But ——— having killed him, *take the flint out of his petrol lighter . . .!!!!*

He is, let us say, the connoisseur of the unnecessary.

Let us now look at this attitude in its practical manifestation.

You find him in this mixture of gloom and lightning behind his pint. You are uncertain. You ask him: ‘How is tricks?’ and he says with what appears to be a smile that everything is game ball. Instantly divining that you are in the presence of the momentous, you talk about the weather; then – an uneasy pause. You wait. The next salute is this, said in an undertone, with dead-pan face.

‘You heard, of course, that I was in digs?’

He well knows that you haven’t heard no such a thing, and you dutifully tell him so.

‘Ah, yes,’ he says. ‘In digs again after seventeen years of the happiest married life any man ever had. And I’ll tell you what was a great consolation. The two of them was buried in the same grave.’

If you are yourself even one-eighth a true Dublin Man, your reaction will be instantaneous. You will say:

‘Pairdin?’

A short pause here. Then:

‘Ah, yes. The two is in the one grave.’

Observe the unique Dublin dual number in full flight.

‘The two is in the one grave and I am back above in Heytesbury Street in digs with the young chisler Nicholas. You heard about the mad brother-in-law coming home on a visit out of the British Army three-quarters in the jigs?’

He asks you this question for the sole reason that he knows you never heard any such a thing.

‘Ah yes. He come in one night with three bottles in him and a serviette out of the B. and I. dining room. I told Mary the wife to lave him alone. Give him his head, says I, and he’ll be all right. Well in any case he began to fooster around the house and inside the hour he has the stairs on fire. I

ordered all hands to the pumps, so to speak. We got the fire out after about an hour but in the meantime this character is inside the kitchen with all the taps in the gas meter full on, full bore. In any case the wife goes in and offers him a cigarette to get him out of the place and the next salute is the whole kitchen is blun up and the wife killed on the spot, without a scratch on your man. He then gets a hold of a sledge-hammer when I'm doing the needful about the wife and away up with him into an attic under the rafters. And I'll tell you one thing about this man. A decenter chiner never wore a hat. Bar he was jarred.'

'I see,' you then say, incredulously.

'Well in any case, when I got the wife's body covered under blankets, the brother-in-law was working on the ceiling with the sledge-hammer, working from above, and didn't the unfortunate poor man knock a lump of plaster down on Micky, the eldest boy. Killed him outright. After that our friend passes into some class of a coma. A hard case if you like. A character. I suppose I could call him my best friend. But a divil when he has the few jars on him. In any case I sent a message for the Guards and the doctors to come but at eight in the morning this character wakes up and says he is off for the day to go to Killarney on the Radio Express. How are you! There I was with the wife and the eldest dead, the half of the house in ruins – *and I wouldn't mind only on the way out he kicked the milk bottle to pieces and the young chisler Tomaus roaring his head off for his breakfast!*'

I trust the reader gets the point. Arson, murder, madness – these things are by the Dublin Man accepted with an indulgent smile. But the quite gratuitous fracture of a bottle of milk, extraneous to the anterior transaction, quite external to the former situation of drunkenness and passion . . . utterly unforgivable! Inexcusable lapse!

He then finishes the pint, folds the paper up until it is a cube of tiny dimension, smiles, and says: 'The good lady? I trust she is keeping well?' and out with him.

If you are a man – even a Kerryman – I hope you will be too astounded to reply to that one.

I will have more to say about the Dublin Man. Simple folk keep saying that Dublin is 'too big', the traffic is awful and

rural Ireland is becoming depopulated. What nonsense! The sole function of rural Ireland is to provide the human ingredients for the constitution of the Dublin Man, who never lasts more than three generations in Dublin town. And I myself a Dublin Man? N.B.L!

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It will be recalled that some weeks ago I undertook (too light-heartedly, alas) to disclose to readers the true nature of this character, the Dublin Man. Only when I came to close quarters was the immensity of the task manifest. I realise now that no human being of woman born – as in fact most are – can dissect or expound the Dublin Man. Have you ever met the Dublin Man who can claim a Dublin grandfather? Such does not exist. Rootless extracinate, the Dublin Man dies out and eternally is miraculously reborn. He is the unknowable fugitive, the incommunicate *maoufatan* of the Dublin streets. But dare not one attempt to present limited aspects of his character, granted that the ultimate *mystique* will be intact? Well, perhaps.

Once upon a time, in an immense inundation of vanity, I thought the Dublin Man might be analysed through his language. For example, minimum and chromium become *minium* and *chronyum*. A funeral is a *furenal*. There are many such words. Recently a Dublin Man (a 'newsboy' of sixty-one) told me that he had got drunk on 'wine' on a certain Sunday, and having nothing to do while the pubs were closed in the afternoon, appointed himself a car park attendant outside Croke Park, where a large match was in progress. 'When the crowd come out,' he said, 'I seen two priests come out. They come over to me and wan of them looks at me very hard. *Tell me, me good man*, says he, *do YOU take stilumants?*'

On another occasion, a Dublin Man who was doing some work for me inquired whether I had got the permission of the Corporation for certain alterations I had carried out inside a house. I told him I had not, that nobody would know about it, and enjoined him to keep his own mouth shut.

Sairtintly I will, he said, *but if they do find out, they'll be after you with a human cry.*

In my former article I tried to expound his usage of the