

drop was the footpath near the convent; planks were placed on tar barrels to keep the animals away. Everywhere else from the mill to the top of the town, cattle jammed the street from an early hour, and here or there on the pavement a special calf was displayed in a creel or in a crudely made pen. Sows grunted underfoot and squealed disapproval when potential buyers poked them too enthusiastically; many of those dealers chewed tobacco and intermittently launched large streams of brown spittle towards the pavement - small boys down there amongst the merchandise were often the recipients.

Down near the pump the gathering thinned out to herds of sheep and goats and here the latecomers had a last free space where they could gather momentum before plunging into the brown and white mass to buy and sell. Their cattle ran with them and incredibly found a position where none seemed possible. The ritual of bargaining was carried out to the fullest; hand clasps, spits and swears and walking away in postured refusal only to return and negotiate again, until finally the luck penny was argued out.

In the market square were the "Cheap Jacks" standing by the fall-away sides of their canopied lorries. With all the vigour of Arab traders they sold second hand clothes, pots and pans, delph, statues, lamps and glasses, Japanese vases, holy water fonts, brushes, clocks and chow dog mantlepiece ornaments. It was all there and the sing song voices which accompanied it offered a free set of plates with every purchase over a pound.

There were many pubs in Foxford and with them as many businesses. Shops that had long since ceased to sell liquor in any quantity held onto the licence and kept the permit valid. Some had a grocery on one side with the bar on the other, and the "snug" was warm and inviting, with a big turf fire and bags of meal and sides of bacon surrounding the customers. It was a favourite place too for the publican to store his barrels of stout, to being it "into condition," and many a man, who denied to his wife that he had been in a certain hostelry, was revealed for the liar that he was by the red ring from the Guinness porter barrel imprinted upon the seat of his pants.

In the drapery shops the inevitable mahogany counter was tucked away into a corner at the back. Normal business had ceased in many but the normality of the license was maintained by a few bottles of whiskey or sherry on the dusty shelves. The most famous of all was an establishment where the enterprising proprietor made it possible to order your coffin over a pint; a sign over the door of the premises read: GROCERY AND BAR. FUNERAL REQUISITES SUPPLIED. This same gentleman owned another shop with again the little bar at the rear; prominently on display on the counter was a basketful of spectacles, and the customers tested them for suitability

by viewing different articles positioned on the shelves; others brought a few pairs out into the street to assess them in the sunlight.

The Boy's National School which I attended was built over the grounds of an old graveyard, and it never seemed to the masters or the pupils to be even mildly sacrilegious, that every time the dry toilets were cleaned out, up came a coffin lid or some such reminder of eternal destiny. The school was old, and the well trodden floorboards had many knot holes in them, which proved to be marvellous urinary targets for the youthful clientele so strategically placed above them. The headmaster was typical of the school system of that time in Ireland, possessing as he did a marvellous love for his boys and a wonderful talent for imparting knowledge to them. Most of those boys were barefooted, and the meagre fuel allowance to heat the building had to be supplemented by the efforts of the children themselves who, each morning brought in a number of sods of turf. On Monday mornings, the headmaster "feeling the weekend" as they say, would have assigned to the class an awesome copy book exercise — calculated to give him an hour's gentle snoring; his snooze always ended the same way — by a wad of inksoaked blotting paper, dispatched at him with unerring accuracy from the catapult of my chum. The master would spring awake and shout, 'I know it's you Gaughan, you little pigeon!'

Our major brush with the church came about during confirmation rehearsal time; we went to the practice via the corner shop, and although we paid for our farthing biscuits, we liberally helped ourselves for free from the sacks of oats stacked outside the store. The crunching of oats was more than the old canon could endure and he threw us all out. Challenge to ecclesiastical rulings was a rare thing then in rural Ireland, and the holding of dances on Sunday was taboo. The local "ballroom of romance", a tumbledown large galvanised shed near the railway station was owned by a dissenter who defiantly advertised and held a dance on a Sunday night; a fellow dissenter waxed eloquent about the event and stated that he admired, 'Burke's stand against Rome!'

That corner shop always had a large portion of dried salted ling, hard as a board, hanging on the door jamb. Although Foxford was only sixteen miles from the sea, hardly any fresh sea fish was ever available, and it was only on Fridays that a horse cart arrived in the town with a box of mackerel or herring for sale, and the usual dilisk or carrageen moss — edible seaweeds. Ennisrone was the nearest sea fishing town, and even there the fishermen had a meagre living and could not sustain themselves by it alone. There was no taste for sea fish in the Ireland of those years; people in Foxford who wanted guaranteed delivery for the Fridays, arranged to have a regular