supply from McCabes of Dublin — it came down on the night train, all fresh and nicely packed in a small straw bag.

When the dreaded fungus Phytophthora Infestans blighted the potato crop in 1845 and destroyed the staple food of the country, a French diplomat was in Achill, and he described the pitiable condition of the dead and the dying — close by the sea, a sea that he noted was teeming with shoals of fish, but through either apathy or ignorance the people were unable to catch them. It would seem that even then, the inhabitants of the north western seaboard did not eat fish in any quantity.

"Corner boy" was then a disparaging term, but the "corner boy" was not an offensive person; his most heinous crime was to whistle approvingly after every passing girl. Those "boys", some up to seventy years of age, regardless of the weather, assembled after tea at the two main corners in the centre of the town; one corner was more popular than the other but the groups never mixed and always frequented their own side. There was no social stigma attached to being a "corner boy", and most families from time to time had members; a subtle distinction existed between the "regulars" and those who were not permanent attenders, and whose families referred to their presence there as "going up to the corner". The corner was a talk spot — gossip and comment and happenings in the town, and observations on the passersby; it was always necessary to greet the group, particularly from a motor car, because the absence of a courtesy was an indication that the individual would be "getting too big for himself". Not all of the time was spent in conversation, there were often long periods of silence, and on Sunday mornings, with everybody in their best clothes, a game of "pitch and toss" would take place, the coins being thrown into the air from the back of a pocket comb with suitable accompanying invocations from the tosser, which to the ears and eyes of an innocent observer might well be mistaken for an unusual religious practice.

In 1933 I went to a secondary school at the Cistercian Abbey, Roscrea. The country around the monastery was fertile, and it abounded in the past with the estates of the landowners who had acquired plantations during the Elizabethan and Cromwellian rule. Many of our school outings took us to those places; the desmesnes we visited were full of stories, hushed whispers of Cromwell's soldiers and Irish gentry; but they were peopled now by elderly spinsters, retired colonels, eccentrics, and all the left overs of a by-gone age. The mansions had slipped into decay, the ornamental pools were choked with weed, and the large conservatories in need of glass and paint — the once shrub-lined paths had fused quietly back into nature and over it all lay the eerie uncanny twilight air,



damp in the winter gloom, and full of ghostly tales of happenings long ago.

The Cistercian monk is a contemplative, but manual labour is part of his daily routine. The abbot would lead the priests and brothers into the fields to dig and weed, no doubt an excellent physical exercise, but it humbled the man and made all equal. The work at the monastery centered on farming, and with it the diverse and allied trades which went to make the community self sufficient; the abbey was the "big house", and all that took place within its walls or on its farmland became guidance or gossip for the local people.

The food for the college was provided by the abbey, and the huge brown and white loaves from the bakery had a fresh, crusty and wholesome flavour, mouth watering even in memory. 'Brown bread! Brown bread!' was the rallying call of the rugby team.

This monastic and scholastic centre was rich in the talent and personalities of its lay and clerical staff, and the most endearing and outstanding character was the president, Father Ailbe Sadlier; but nobody ever called him that. I will always remember "The Boss" as an oil painting: the Cistercian habit fitted him well — he was tall and of moderate build but protruding slightly at the stomach; his sparse and tonsured hair was pure white. He presided firmly but benevolently over his large family of boys; he supervised them at prayer and in the refectory, corresponded with their parents, worried when they were ill, and hooshed them on with a belt of a hurley on the backside when they slowed down going through a doorway. He had a soft place in his heart for the "hard man" — the boy who was always to the fore in devilment or pranks, or the boy who lagged in class.

In keeping with such a character there were so many memorable poses; arms akimbo, feet apart, and chin pushed out, he would fumble for words which would not come because of mounting rage at some rowdy display. Stern faced, with his head bent in confessional concentration, he listened to a small boy ask for an early sleep which would excuse him evening study. Again the hands were on his hips and the feet wide spread, but this time his head was cast upwards and his teeth working as his interest was captivated by a companion's talk. Or hurley in hand at the sideline, his frame fully stretched and arching forward, he would place his hand over his eyes, and pucker his brow in many ridges as he peered intently towards the scrum. I have quite forgotten which pose he held when I told him at the age of eleven that I wanted to be a Canadian mounted policeman.

We were at Roscrea for six years, where we struggled for places