

Ireland. Never has there been a more wretched country; the men women and children go about half naked, with no shelter other than their poor cramped huts which do little to protect them from the ravages of the weather. And to make matters worse, they share these flimsy dwellings with all their farmyard animals. Their staple diet is made up of potatoes and sour milk, hardly ever any bread and rarely any meat. But the wretchedness of these people is less a result of the barren land, than to the extreme ignorance and great apathy in which they wallow. Their lot would be less hard if they were more industrious, but they are so used to their way of life that they do not even recognise their own wretchedness.

Nearly all of these quasi savages are Catholics, and their tedious fanaticism is really pitiable. When we passed their disgusting cottages — in which we never set foot, except to glance inside, as one would glance at something repulsive — they would throw themselves in front of us, falling at our feet with their faces in the mud and reciting long prayers for our success. All of them, men and women, wore wide filthy scapulars around their necks, as well as chaplets or rosaries.

There is a shocking contrast between this class of Irishmen, which makes the majority of the population, and the easy life style of the gentry, who are nearly all very rich. The latter are surrounded by luxury and abundance, while the former are in thrall to a poverty that I have not even begun to describe. This is the reason for the inevitable hatred of the lower classes for the rich, whom they see as an insult to them in their poverty. So it is no surprise that this great disparity in life styles, exacerbated by religious fanaticism should have produced the rebellion that has troubled Ireland for so long.....

Jobet would not have known that one of the main reasons for housing the animals in the dwellings was to provide heat for the occupants, nor would he have known that their bedding was shared with them also — rushes or straw. He went on with his compatriots and their Irish auxiliaries to drive the British out of Castlebar, but the French were later defeated at Ballinamuck and were repatriated to France with the customary honours of war of that time. The rebel Irish paid the penalty; the events at Castlebar were dubbed: "The Races of Castlebar"; to commemorate the speed with which the British evacuated the town; a street there was named "Staball Street," a district near Foxford acquired the unlikely name of "Alleylecampaign," and the unfortunate peasants of County Mayo sank back into the bog and their apathy.

One hundred years after those events my grandfather carried out his assigned task extremely well, and he remained in Foxford.

That mill that he had helped to build, aptly called Providence Woollen Mills, was to prosper and manufacture high quality products for global markets, but World War One in the interval had imposed curtailment of wool supplies, and he went to Dublin in 1916 to arrange, amongst other things, an overdraft with the Bank of Ireland, to enable the factory to lay in stocks. Unwittingly he arrived in the middle of the rebellion:

"We prepared for the Spring Show at Ballsbridge, which was to go ahead in spite of the war. In fact life in Ireland was very little disturbed by the European upheaval. Dublin restaurants served saccharine tablets instead of sugar, and there were certain restrictions as to the amount of food that could be served with afternoon tea!

Butter was half a crown a pound, which was considered an appalling price and was scarce into the bargain. Tea was plentiful, and the system of giving sugar when tea was purchased enabled the people to get a reasonable quantity of sugar by buying tea beyond their needs. Eggs were dear, but in an agricultural country where other foods were available, the high price of butter and eggs was not altogether a calamity.

In only one particular aspect was Ireland tragically concerned in the first world war. Every day Irishmen marched singing to the North Wall en route for France or far Gallipoli, and every day the newspapers printed long columns of casualties that brought grief to many an Irish home. Yet on the surface, life in Ireland was little disturbed and I set out for Ballsbridge as usual on Easter Sunday in April 1916 — we arranged our goods for the show, and walked out again on Easter Monday expecting a busy week.

As we went, we noticed men at windows in many houses but took no particular notice. When we arrived we were told that there would be no show. Dublin was in insurrection and the men we had idly observed were snipers. We got back to the hotel, the Shelbourne in Stephen's Green without incident. However, insurrection or no we had the responsibility of the valuable goods we had left in Ballsbridge, so on Tuesday we made our way out then once more and packed and covered the exhibits as well as possible.

On emerging we found it impossible to get back the way we had come, because of the intense sniping. Finally we made a long detour by way of Donnybrook and got back to the hotel which faced the enclosed park — St. Stephen's Green, which the insurrectionists had occupied. The moments when we had to walk past the park before we reached the hotel were somewhat nerve racking, for besides the force inside the park railings, there were snipers on the