

to dream of an industry in Foxford — the men were stripped and painted orange and green and flung into the river which at that point runs swiftly over a rocky bed — shots were fired down at them, but by scrambling, swimming and hiding they managed to keep alive. One of them hid under the bridge for hours, clinging precariously; in the end they made their way to different houses where they received attention and assistance.

It was all over, but injustice had been done and innocent men had suffered. In spite of all counsels of prudence, the superior protested vigorously; people spoke to her of reprisals of the possible effects of getting into the military's bad books; but she would not be deterred, her people had been illused; in the sequel the men were compensated.

I might not be telling these tales now if a bullet had taken a slightly lower course one early morning. It was during that same Black and Tan period that I awoke that morning and heard the sound of shots; I went to the window of my bedroom which faces the dwelling house attached to the police barracks — I saw at once what was happening. The local IRA were launching an attack on the barracks, and before I could draw my head in, a bullet (probably not intended for me) passed just over my head and lodged in the bedroom wall.

At a later date we had a visit from two Black and Tans who entered my house at 7 am. one day and searched every inch of it and gave particular attention to the papers in my desk: it was quite a formidable task but availed them nothing.

If they hoped for some seditious document or something that would connect us with the IRA activities they were disappointed. I had no politics, I had a job to do and gave all my attention to it because it seemed to me worth doing well. I could see in the lives and homes of the people the reflection of what the coming of Providence Mills meant to the district. Ceaseless work and ceaseless care were necessary to keep that effort going, especially in such unquiet times, and I thought I was not serving my country too badly if I did my ordinary day's work. I could look back to the potatoes and Indian Meal diet of the people in earlier days and contrast it with the still modest but more varied table that wage earning had made possible. I could in quiet moments recapture the smell of the mud cabins where the pig and poultry dwelt with the poor family, not because the poor approved of that arrangement but because they had no better way and were too harassed, sick and sad, to plan better ways. I could remember the manure heaps where the vegetable gardens are now. I had gone into the homes where a sick man or woman lay on hay or even rushes on the floor.....

Whilst Frank Sherry, that conscientious and hard working Northerner laboured in his small mill with his workers, Ireland's destiny was being decided in a room at 22 Hans Place, London SW. where the Irish delegation to the treaty negotiations met for the last time and agreed to sign the document, after agonising days of indecision and differences. The mill manager's papers reveal the effects that treaty was to have on Ireland:

'I have yet to meet the man or woman who likes to recall the events that followed the signing of the Treaty with England on 6 Dec. 1921. Almost before the ink was dry — to borrow a phrase connected with another Treaty — conflicting opinions were being hotly expressed. The Dublin papers which printed the full text of the treaty were studied intently in our little town, as no doubt they were elsewhere and there were those who said it was a good settlement of a dispute that had gone on for seven hundred years and seemed at times impossible of settlement. It looked to moderate opinion as if our problems had been solved — our representatives had signed certain Articles of Agreement, which if they did not give quite what a number of people wanted, gave much more than the most optimistic Home Ruler had ever hoped for. Many of us thought that peace in our time had come.

There were others who did not see the Articles of Agreement in any such light and there was talk of a certain amount of pressure brought to bear to force the Irish representatives to sign. Dail Eireann, the national parliament, ratified the treaty and the hopes of peaceful times seemed to revive — but it was not to be; we saw the country split into two armed camps. By 1922 civil war had us in its grip and civil war was an ugly thing not merely for the material damage caused, but because it stirs up unholy feelings of hate against our neighbour. There was a certain amount of activity in our district and one night our sleep was broken by the sound of an explosion. In the morning we learned that the railway bridge had been blown up, and for thirty days no letters or parcels reached or left Foxford. To a business concern that state of things can be very serious as our daily mail both ways was heavy, and we could hardly imagine ourselves getting through the day without our usual incoming and outgoing orders, not to mention the necessity to keep in touch with various firms who supplied our wants in raw materials and the many requirements of a flourishing factory.

Yet, we had scarcely any need to consider what we should do; the workers were always and had always been the first consideration; we would not have dreamed of leaving a loom idle while it could be kept moving to maintain a man or woman at work. We did not lose even one hour's time, we worked a full day every day