A Lost Abbey Play: Frederick Ryan's 'The Laying of the Foundations'

JOHN KELLY

WHEN Frederick Ryan died in April 1913 at the age of thirty-nine he was described by Francis Sheehy Skeffington as 'the saint of Irish Rationalism'.[1] In the acrimonious atmosphere of early twentieth-century Ireland a rationalist was a *rara avis*, and a rationalist who was also an avowed socialist and agnostic was a very black swan indeed. As such, Fred (he seems to have preferred the abbreviated form of his christian name) Ryan found himself at one time or another arguing against practically every received Irish opinion, although always, as Desmond Ryan (no relation of his) has remarked 'with the utmost courtesy and persuasiveness'.[2]

He first emerges in 1896 when he became a member of the Celtic Literary Society, the debating club, organized largely by William Rooney and Arthur Griffith, which later formed the basis of the Sinn Fein party.[3] For a time Ryan agreed with Sinn Fein ideas but gradually his outspokenness alienated him from Griffith and the two quarrelled. Meanwhile he occasionally acted with Frank Fay's amateur Ormonde Dramatic Society and when this turned itself into the Irish National Theatre Society in 1902 he was elected Secretary — the capacity in which he wrote a famous letter inviting Yeats to accept the Presidency of the new organization.[4] It was for this Society that he wrote *The Laying of the Foundations* and this piece was first performed for the Cumann na nGaedeal at the Antient Concert Rooms on 29 October 1902. It was revived in December of the same year at the Camden

[1] Francis Sheehy Skeffington, 'Frederick Ryan', *Irish Review*, III, 27, May 1913 119.
[2] Desmond Ryan, *Remembering Sion*, 1934, p. 53.
[3] Minute Book of the Celtic Literary Society, National Library of Ireland, MS. 200.
[4] Quoted in Lennox Robinson, *Ireland's Abbey Theatre*, 1951, pp. 27–8.

Street Hall when it became the first play to be produced by the National Theatre Society.

Although deeply involved with the drama company, which later, of course, became the Abbey Theatre Company, Ryan found time for journalism under his own and his two pen names, 'Irial' and 'Finian'. He grew, however, increasingly weary of the orthodoxy and superficiality of most Irish periodicals and newspapers and in 1904 he and John Eglinton tried to redress the balance by launching *Dana*, 'A Magazine of Independent Thought', which, so the advance publicity announced, was to be 'the medium for the discussion of questions shunned or confused by the ordinary Press, and which would aim at promoting the interchange of opinions by writers of all shades of progressive thought'.[1] The work of many leading writers of the Irish Literary Revival appeared in this monthly, including an early poem by James Joyce — although the editors missed a chance of greatness when they turned down an early draft of *A Portrait of the Artist*, apparently because Eglinton refused to publish that which he could not understand.[2]

With or without *A Portrait*, *Dana* proved too progressive: it lasted for less than a year, yet this gave Ryan time to write sufficient articles to be collected into his only book, *Criticism and Courage*.[3] Deprived of his own magazine he now began to publish in the *Nationist* and in the *New Age*, then edited by the socialist J. M. Robertson.

In 1906, with Sheehy Skeffington, Kettle, Malony and Maurice Joy, Ryan tried to establish a 'National Democratic Committee' under the chairmanship of Michael Davitt. Plans seemed to be going well when Davitt died suddenly and the project collapsed. Later in the same year Ryan set up as something of an alternative the Dublin Philosophic Society which arranged a series of public lectures 'in furtherance of Rationalist propaganda',[4] and in 1907 started the *National Democrat* with the aim of 'continuing in another shape the work for which the 'National Democratic

1 Mary Hutton Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS. 8611 (7).
2 Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, New York, 1959, p. 152.
3 Frederick Ryan, *Criticism and Courage and Other Essays*, Tower Press Booklets no. 6, Dublin, 1906.
4 Skeffington, op. cit., p. 117.

Committee' had been intended'.[1] This paper, a penny monthly, ran for seven issues and on its demise left Ryan very much out of pocket.

With the failure of this venture he left Dublin for Cairo to take up the assistant editorship of the *Egyptian Standard,* but returned in 1909 to wield his pen in defence of the beleaguered *Irish Nation.* While back in Ireland he helped to reorganize and revitalize the Dublin Socialist Party of which he subsequently became Secretary. Later he moved to London to edit Wilfrid Scawen Blunt's *Egypt* and it was on a visit to Blunt at Horsham that he died from appendicitis in 1913.

Ryan had the sort of burning integrity that refuses to subdue itself no matter how unpopular the cause. As Sheehy Skeffington has recorded, 'He never wrote a line which he did not believe and his beliefs were not those popular with the dictators of Irish journalistic expression. The severest condemnation of Irish journalism today is that there was no place in it for Fred Ryan'.[2]

There is not room here to give a detailed analysis of his ideas, but all his writing is distinguished by an attempt to probe beneath facile orthodoxy and to trace any given argument back by rigorous logic to its basic premises. It was inevitable that his uncompromising approach to questions of the day should cause annoyance. In *Dana* he attacked the two most sacred cows of Irish nationality at that time: the Gaelic League (for its reactionary tendencies) and Thomas Davis (for supposedly dodging certain crucial moral issues). He even criticized the Irish Church for refusing to enter into serious intellectual debate with free-thinkers and later, in the *Irish Review*, denounced those priests who under the guise of exercising moral censorship were in fact trying to ban political — and especially socialist — literature.

It was not long before a man like Ryan, who asked uncomfortable questions and who insisted upon staying for an answer, was accused of the most heinous crime in the Irish canon — that of being anti-national. He answered this charge in 'On Language and Political Ideals', an article which perhaps best sums up his position *vis à vis* Ireland and Irish society. He points out that

[1] Ibid.
[2] Ibid., p. 114.

the whole question of nationality is more complex than many glib nationalists appreciate:

> As to the kind of nation that is desirable I have a very clear notion; but as to the 'spirit of nationality', and whether a distinctive language is an essential or accidental part of that spirit, whether political autonomy is or is not an essential of nationality, all this is a species of speculation in which you arrive at any desired conclusion by first giving your terms and phrases the required meaning.[1]

Instead of vaguely theorizing Irish people would, he maintains, be better employed in improving education and the condition of the workers and of the aged. He does not know whether they would thus stimulate national feeling but is certain that they would be doing something even more worthwhile:

> we should be making a strong and cultivated and self-reliant people. And the reason, I confess, why I stand for Irish independence is because by it alone can we obtain the machinery to produce this.[2]

Predominantly concerned as he was with philosophy, religion and politics, Ryan offered no coherent aesthetic doctrine in his essays and articles. Nevertheless his ideas on literature emerge in a letter which he wrote just after the first production of his play. On 22 November 1902 the *United Irishman* printed a letter from Thomas Kettle in which he attacked Yeats for failing to establish a clear moral standpoint in his plays. The following week Ryan replied, pointing out that what Kettle was really looking for was a philosopher and not a poet. Yet he is careful to point out, *contra* Yeats, that 'Didacticism and art may be united and often are'.[3] He himself prefers the realism and didacticism of Tolstoy and Zola to the mere entertainment of Scott and Dumas, for the former

> . . . have an idea behind their story-telling and when you lay down their books you feel that you have got some fresh light on human character, on human policy, on social action or on the conduct of men in relation to other men. To me the one seems immeasurably higher art than the other . . .[4]

The Laying of the Foundations is certainly didactic, and nowhere more so than in the scene between Michael and Nolan. The straightforward plot centres around Michael O'Loskin's growing

1 *Dana*, vol. 1, 9, January 1905, 275.
2 Ibid., p. 276.
3 *United Irishman*, 29 November 1902.
4 Ibid.

awareness of the corruption and deceit which surrounds him. He is appointed City Architect through the influence of Alderman Farrelly, the head of a building syndicate and friend of his father. He trusts both his father, who is a publican and property speculator, and Farrelly, little realizing that in return for the job they expect him to shut his eyes to various irregularities in the execution of civic contracts. Under the influence of his strong-willed fiancée, Eileen, like him the child of middle-class parents on the make, he comes into contact with socialist ideas, but is converted to them only when Nolan, a left wing editor, reveals to him the full extent of his father and Farrelly's fraudulent behaviour. His suspicions on this score have already been aroused by the discovery that Farrelly's workmen are laying the foundations of a municipal asylum to only half the required depth. Caught in a conflict between family affection and public duty he thinks of resigning his position but finally decides to stay on and wage an all-out war on corruption and malpractice.

It would be churlish to criticize too rigorously a play that was acknowledged by its author to be defective and it is printed here more for its historical curiosity than its literary value. Nevertheless we ought to notice the great extent to which it reverberates with echoes of Ibsen and Shaw — *Widowers' Houses* and *An Enemy of the People* being the two plays that it recalls most readily to mind. This similarity is significant, for Yeats had founded the Irish Literary Theatre largely to present poetic drama which he was sure would find, perhaps uniquely in Ireland, a popular audience. Yet here, with the advent of the Fays into the Irish dramatic movement, a very different kind of drama emerges, one based not on poetry but on logical argument and everyday speech and constructed in the 'scientific' manner that Yeats so hated in Shaw and 'Dr' Ibsen. Indeed, it was the triumph of the Ibsenites and the Realists that eventually drove Yeats to the 'aristocratic' Noh drama. In Ryan's *The Laying of the Foundations* we see an early example of the new Irish genre.

Yet, while Ryan set out to write a play of social realism, he was alive, as many other imitators were not, to Ibsen's use of symbolism and makes a clumsy gesture towards it. The foundations of the title, as is rather crudely stressed in the closing lines, do not refer merely to the asylum building but to the new city,

the future society, which must be raised on the sure foundations of 'Liberty and Truth'. In the first writing, too, Farrelly's company was called 'The *National* Building Syndicate'. Apart from this, Ryan's socialist ideas come rather dogmatically, especially from the mouth of Nolan who proclaims himself for 'Freedom for all and the rule of Labour' and denounces 'the drones, the landlords, capitalists, governors and loafers who take without rendering service'. His rationalist opinions are also much in evidence: Michael, it is suggested, takes a more lofty moral attitude than his father because he has been better educated. As his father says 'We made a terrible mistake, Farrelly. I thought Michael took after me. That's the worst of giving a boy a good education'.

Ryan died in 1913, the year of the great Dublin Lock-Out but already in 1902 he was able to point out some of the contradictions between the protestations of patriotism and the exploitation of the Irish working classes which made that event so bitter and long-lasting:

EILEEN. It seems that it is no harm, Mr O'Loskin, getting 'These people's' votes at election times; but any other interest in them in injudicious.

O'LOSKIN. Oh, well, we won't go into that.

EILEEN (Smiling). No. Of course at elections everybody is the workingman's friend.

In 1902 there were many brands of socialism to choose from and it is difficult to place Ryan in the left wing spectrum with any very precise accuracy, though from the remark of Desmond Ryan, 'he wars upon all physical forces . . . and Marxian Socialists',[1] we can assume that he was to the right of Larkin and Connolly. Probably he took up a democratic position not far removed from the Irish Labour Party of today. Certainly the uncompromising note at the end of the play owes as much, we feel, to his own rigorous intellect as to any belief in the inevitability of the historical process:

FARRELLY (Going out). Then let it be war.

MICHAEL (Going to his desk). The city of the future demands it. It can be nothing else but war.

[1] Op. cit.

The question of what we miss from not having the first act can be partially answered from contemporary reviews. The main loss seems to be Mrs MacFadden, a full-blooded and apparently O'Casey-like figure who makes unsuccessful attempts to hide her supreme vulgarity. Otherwise Michael's absolute trust in his father and Farrelly is stressed so that his personal dilemma in the second act is the more acute.

The text, even in the incomplete form in which we have it is in a transitional state. Sheehy Skeffington wrote that 'Ryan himself came to regard *The Laying of the Foundations* as a somewhat crude production',[1] and, as we shall see, the author took back the prompt copy to amend it. Surprisingly, Yeats seems to have liked the play: in a memorandum written at the time of the inquiry into the Abbey's proposed patent he described it as 'a very witty though rather rambling attack on municipal corruption of a slightly socialistic tinge . . .'[2] Perhaps he admired the author's independent outlook, for at the time of *The Countess Cathleen* controversy Ryan had written a letter attacking both Yeats and his detractors — Yeats because he had appealed to two divines for support instead of defending his right to say what he pleased. We now realize that this was Yeats's strategem to keep Martyn, and his money, on the side of the theatre, but Ryan, who could not have known this, looked upon it as an admission that the denunciation of the play would have been valid without such approval.[3]

Lennox Robinson in his book, *Ireland's Abbey Theatre*, describes Ryan's play and two others by James Cousins as 'laying the foundations of the Abbey Theatre' and goes on:

> Some years later Mr Ryan died. Yeats wanted to revive the play, but the manuscript could not be found, though diligent search was made for its recovery.[4]

What happened to the manuscript is told in a letter sent by Frank Fay to Joseph Holloway on 6 May 1913, just after Ryan's death. Fay explains that Ryan took the script away to rewrite it but says that he has a 'part' (presumably that of O'Loskin whom he played) and a draft of some of it which he had taken down in

1 Op. cit., p. 115.
2 National Library of Ireland, MS. 10952(1).
3 *United Irishman*, 20 May 1899, p. 4.
4 Op. cit., p. 30.

shorthand from Ryan's dictation and typed out at Craig and Gardeners where he worked. He adds that he does not imagine that Ryan 'would have cared to have it printed'.[1] Presumably he showed the typescript to Ryan when he had finished it, for as it appears in the National Library of Ireland (MS. 10950 [13]) it includes emendations in pencil and ink which, judging from autograph letters in Henderson's diary, seem to be in Ryan's hand. The text has rather more authority, therefore, than if it had been put together merely from Fay's shorthand notes. As it now exists the draft is in blue typescript and stapled into a brown, paper-covered prompt book. It is unnamed. The book contains only Act. II (O'Loskin's part seems to have disappeared) and the pages are numbered 24–45 inclusive. Besides corrections over the type there are manuscript additions on the verso blank sheets opposite the text and on scraps of paper, the backs of receipts and, ironically enough for such an anti-capitalist play, stock bills, pinned to the bottom of the page or included loosely. The present text has followed these emendations in so far as they make sense. Even at a first reading one notices certain ungainly repetitions of word and phrase, as well as occasional clumsiness in getting characters on and off the stage. These defects would probably have been removed had Ryan ever found the time to rewrite the play.

On its first performance, 29 October 1902, the play had the following cast:

MR O'LOSKIN, T.C.	F. J. Fay
MICHAEL (his son)	P. J. Kelly
ALDERMAN FARRELLY, Chairman of 'The New Building Syndicate'	J. Dudley Digges
MR MACFADDEN, T.C.	P. MacShiublaigh
MR NOLAN, T.C., editor of *The Free Nation*	N. Butler
MRS O'LOSKIN	Maire Nic Shiublaigh
MRS MACFADDEN	Honor Lavelle
EILEEN, her daughter	Maire T. Quinn

[1] Holloway Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS. 13267 (6).

The Laying of the Foundations

by FRED RYAN

ACT II

Michael's office. Michael is seated at desk examining papers. Enter O'Loskin.

MICHAEL (*Reflectively*). Well the last man here doesn't seem to have killed himself anyhow. Here's a report on the weigh-house works and it hasn't been attended to yet, though it's six-months old.

O'LOSKIN. Aye. I believe he took things a bit easy.

MICHAEL. From all I can hear he wasn't burdened with too great a sense of public duty.

O'LOSKIN. Ah, Mike my boy, there are very few that are, and those that are are none too well liked either. Take things easy, take things easy, my boy. That's the way to get on in the Corporation.

MICHAEL. I suppose so.

O'LOSKIN. How are you gettin on with Farrelly's people?

MICHAEL. All right. Though I had a row with the foreman at the asylum a few days ago. According to their plans they are to lay eight feet foundation of concrete, and they are only laying four feet. I spoke to the foreman and asked him what it meant and he gave me none too civil an answer. I intend to make a row about it. These people must be taught their place.

O'LOSKIN. I don't think they would do anything like that.

MICHAEL. Well it may be the foreman alone is responsible; but if so he must be cleared out of it. I intend to see that the asylum as the first work I have in hand is made a perfect job of.

Enter FARRELLY.

FARRELLY. Good day, O'Loskin. Good day, Mr Michael. They told me I'd find you up here. Lovely day! By gad summer is coming on us before we are out of spring.

MICHAEL. Yes, indeed. A lovely day it is sir.

O'LOSKIN. Well, Farrelly, how goes it with things in general?

FARRELLY. Oh flourishing, flourishing.

O'LOSKIN (*Familiarly*). Have you settled the ironworks board yet?

FARRELLY. No; we haven't come to an agreement with . . . It seems to me we will have trouble at the ironworks some of these days. (*Walks about room. Looks at papers.*) By the way what is this I hear about some impertinence the foreman gave at the asylum, the other day.

MICHAEL (*Rising*). I was there looking over the job and he became rather impertinent when I pointed out that he was only laying a four foot foundation of concrete instead of an eight foot as specified.

FARRELLY. Of course that was a mistake, a mere mistake on your part. The plans are being most strictly carried out and the clerk of the works has never made the slightest complaint.

MICHAEL. It couldn't possibly be a mistake Mr Farrelly. I saw it with my own eyes.

O'LOSKIN. Now Michael there may be a mistake somewhere. Perhaps you ought to make certain before you report or do anything about it. It would be rather awkward if it turned out that you had made a mistake, it would *look* bad.

MICHAEL (*Crossing to centre*). There is no mistake. I called my assistant's attention to it and he was satisfied too, and the matter must of course be reported. No doubt it will be put right when your people's attention is called to it.

FARRELLY. Well it's a trivial thing anyhow, and we'll set it all right. There won't be any quarrel between us over a little matter like that.

MICHAEL. There is a meeting of the Committee on now and I want to go across to it for a few minutes. Will you excuse me Mr Farrelly?

FARRELLY. Certainly, certainly my boy. (*Exit* MICHAEL *upstage left.* O'LOSKIN *crosses right.*) I'm afraid Michael is too precise. He may get himself and us into trouble. He thinks it necessary to report every fiddle-faddle that he thinks is wrong.

O'LOSKIN. Ah, that is only at the start. He will learn the work he has to do right enough in a little time.

FARRELLY. Yes I dare say he's a bit fresh and unsophisticated at first, but he ought to ask instructions before he takes important steps. The idea of proposing to make a report condemning the tenement houses in Smoky Alley!

O'LOSKIN. What! Condemning the tenement houses did you say? What's that?

FARRELLY. Why he has been talking to several of the Committee and proposes to have them pulled down as unsafe. He says they are 'unfit for beasts'. I believe that is the phrase.

O'LOSKIN. Good heavens! And £50 was laid out on them five years ago putting in new drains.

FARRELLY. Yes. I believe he says the drains are as bad as ever.

O'LOSKIN. I thought they made a good job of it when those drains were put in and we got them passed at the time.

FARRELLY. Oh yes they were *passed.* You remember the trouble we had about that though. Anyhow, nothing will do him but to have them all down to the ground. Not a brick, sir; not a brick left.

O'LOSKIN. Well God knows there's something better he could turn his attention to than that. (*Crosses left.*)

FARRELLY. He can't know then that these houses belong to us. I hadn't an opportunity of giving him a hint.

O'LOSKIN. No. I don't think he knows about that property or that I have anv interest in it. I must make it right with him.

FARRELLY (Musing). There was an idea occurred to me in connection with the matter which was the reason I didn't say anything about our interest in them.

O'LOSKIN. What's that?

FARRELLY. Well, I thought if these houses *had* to come down it would be a good site for the new abbatoir and I was suggesting it to McFadden and he thought it the very place. We would have to sell the property to the Corporation of course in that case and there's no doubt that we could buy that old mill in Darkmouth Lane and fit it up in tenements. Smoky Alley is not what it was.

O'LOSKIN. No.

FARRELLY. And since the ironworks opened its foundry there, Darkmouth Lane is rising. McFadden's brother — the pig-merchant — bought some houses there for £200 a piece a few years ago and sold them the other day for £500.

O'LOSKIN. Yes; and Smoky Alley would be just the very place for the abbatoir.

FARRELLY. But when I dropped a hint on the matter to Michael he pooh-poohed it at once and said it was out of the question. He has fixed his mind on a ridiculously expensive site out in the country because he says it's more suitable.

(*Enter* MRS O'LOSKIN.)

MRS O'LOSKIN. Has Michael gone out? (*Seeing* MR FARRELLY) Oh, good morning Mr Farrelly, I didn't see you.

FARRELLY. Good morning Mrs O'Loskin. Well, O'Loskin I'll be going. I've to be over at the Pat Guard office at twelve. Try and settle that affair with Michael if you can. Goodbye Mrs O'Loskin.

O'LOSKIN AND MRS O'LOSKIN. Good morning Mr Farrelly. (O'LOSKIN *goes to door with him and whispers confidentially. Exit* FARRELLY.)

MRS O'LOSKIN. I thought Michael was here and I wanted to tell him to come to Mrs MacFadden's this evening. She asked us over.

O'LOSKIN. No. He has gone to a Committee Meeting. Do you know Molly what Farrelly tells me? Mike has condemned the Smoky Alley houses and wants them pulled down.

MRS O'LOSKIN. Well, on my soul! and they always getting repairs done to them. Wasn't it only last month you got O'Keefe to put a few slates on the roof where the rain was comin' in?

O'LOSKIN. Yes. But Michael says they're rotten. I suppose it's all those people that got typhoid in them.

MRS O'LOSKIN. Oh, the boy must be mad. Did you tell him they were yours?

O'LOSKIN. No. He doesn't know that yet.

MRS O'LOSKIN. Well, sure that's all right, when you tell him they're our own. What a fuss you're makin' of it! I didn't know but you told him.

O'LOSKIN. From some of the things I hear of Mike, I don't know what to say. I thought he'd have more consideration. D'ye know what I think?

MRS O'LOSKIN. What?

O'LOSKIN. I think Eily is turning his head; filling him up with all those high-flown ideas she has. In fact I'm beginning to believe Miss Eily wouldn't be such a nice match for Mike after all. The latest I hear of her is carrying it a bit far.

MRS O'LOSKIN. What is that?

O'LOSKIN. Last week I hear she spoke at several meetings in Nolan's Ward of the Labourers' Union. She writes articles for Nolan's paper too, I hear.

MRS O'LOSKIN. Good heavens! Is it talking on a platform before a lot of men? I never thought she went that far!

O'LOSKIN. It's not so much that as having her mixed up with such a lot as Nolan's crew. It's not respectable or nice at all. And it puts us in a very ugly position.

MRS O'LOSKIN. Oh, it's the spouting I mind. I never heard of such a thing when I was her age.

O'LOSKIN. Through her, I believe Mike has made Nolan's acquaintance now; and the fact is, he wants looking after. (*A knock at door. Enter* EILEEN.)

MRS O'LOSKIN. Good morning Eily.

EILEEN. Good morning Mrs O'Loskin.

O'LOSKIN. Good morning Eily.

EILEEN. I thought Michael was here.

MRS O'LOSKIN. No. He's just gone out for a few minutes.

EILEEN. Will he be back soon?

MRS O'LOSKIN. Yes they say he will be back directly. Will you wait?

EILEEN. Very well then, I will wait. I just wanted to see him for a minute.

MRS O'LOSKIN. Won't you sit down? We are going over to your mother's this evening.

EILEEN. Yes, so I believe, mamma was saying she asked you.

MRS O'LOSKIN. I hope it won't be pouring like the last night we were there.

EILEEN. Indeed I don't know how you got home that night.

(*Pause.*)

MRS O'LOSKIN. Is it a fact what they say Eileen that you are mixing yourself up with those common tradesmen?

EILEEN. What do you mean Mrs O'Loskin?

MRS O'LOSKIN. Is it true that you are making speeches down in some low quarter of the town?

EILEEN. I suppose you mean the lecture I delivered a week or two ago on the 'Rights of Labour' at the Labourers' Hall.

MRS O'LOSKIN. The rights of labour indeed! I wonder a *respectable* girl like you wouldn't be ashamed of making friends with such *rabble*.

EILEEN. I don't think you have any right to speak of my friends in that fashion, Mrs O'Loskin.

MRS O'LOSKIN. What are they but rabble, and Nolan their ringleader?

EILEEN. Why, what harm are they doing you?

MRS O'LOSKIN. Harm! No harm. But it's a nice thing to see you spouting before such characters!

EILEEN (*with stiffness*). I am afraid, Mrs O'Loskin, I had better call back again to see Michael.

O'LOSKIN. Stay, Eileen. Stay. There is no necessity for getting angry.

MRS O'LOSKIN. Oh, let her if she likes (*Exit*).

O'LOSKIN. The missus you know, is a bit hasty. Of course Eileen you know Michael occupies a very responsible position now in the Corporation and it wouldn't look well to have you be seen going round making friends with these people.

EILEEN. It seems that it is no harm, Mr O'Loskin, getting 'these people's' votes at election times; but any other interest in them is injudicious.

O'LOSKIN. Oh, well, we won't go into that.

EILEEN (*Smiling*). No. Of course at elections everybody is the workingman's friend.

(*Enter* MICHAEL *with bundle of papers, etc.* EILEEN *goes to him.*)

MICHAEL (*Agitatedly*). Good morning Eileen. (*He takes no notice of his father but bustles about agitatedly.*)

EILEEN. What is the matter, Michael?

MICHAEL. O nothing. I don't know what things are coming to.

O'LOSKIN. What is it Michael?

MICHAEL. To have one's own family mixed up with such a thing.

O'LOSKIN. What do you mean Michael?

MICHAEL. I was at the Committee Meeting and one of the members passed over to me this morning's *Loyalist* with an article declaring (*turning to his father*) you own the greatest slum in the city, the Smoke Alley houses, that I had just been condemning. A nice figure I cut! Is that a fact that you and Farrelly own these rookeries? Is it a fact?

O'LOSKIN. Michael, control yourself.

MICHAEL. Is it the truth? Is it the truth?

O'LOSKIN. I will leave you Michael until you are a bit calmer. (*Exit* O'LOSKIN.)

MICHAEL. Then it is the truth. (*Goes back to desk.* EILEEN *comes to him.*)

EILEEN. Michael I am sorry for you. I foresaw that you would meet with this sort of trouble when you took the post.

MICHAEL. I am afraid your words were true, Eily. Here is this long article (*Both sit down*) in *The Loyalist* about my father being the greatest slum owner in the city. They say in his houses there have been twenty deaths from typhoid in the last two years and they hint there is a scheme to sell them to the Corporation as a site for the abbatoir. Exactly what Farrelly was mooting. And then the asylum business grows worse and worse.

EILEEN. How is that?

MICHAEL. A week ago I found they were evading their contract in the laying of the foundation; today more reports reach me that they are putting in the worst class of yellow brick and are using the cheapest stuff everywhere. In fact swindling over the whole thing.

EILEEN. Yes. Nolan makes a lot of charges in this week's *Free Nation.*

MICHAEL. Yes. I have the paper here, it was sent to me this morning. And then there is some job on about the abbatoir. The thing is becoming a public scandal. And this is what they dragged me into to cloak. Your words were true Eileen. I have walked into a trap but . . .

EILEEN. But what, Michael?

MICHAEL. They may find they have not caught quite so tame an animal as they bargained for. Nolan was in at the Committee and made charges there. He's keen and clear-headed enough. I passed a note to him saying I wanted to see him afterwards, if convenient. I want to know the grounds he has for these statements. (*Looking at his watch*) He ought to be here now. I wonder would I have time to go over to the Town Clerk's Office before he arrives?

EILEEN. Well I won't stay to interrupt you. I'll see you at our place this evening.

(*Knocking at the door.*)

MICHAEL. Come in!

NOLAN. You wish to see me, Mr O'Loskin?

MICHAEL. Yes. Won't you sit down Mr Nolan.

EILEEN. Goodbye then. I'll see you this evening. (MICHAEL *goes to the door with her.*)

MICHAEL (*Returning*). Now Mr Nolan what is the meaning of these sensational statements you are circulating because it is a matter that concerns me very directly.

NOLAN. Well, Mr O'Loskin, the plain facts are that the asylum is being built in the cheapest and shoddiest fashion out of the worst materials. The New Building Syndicate is known in the trade as the worst employer and they do most of the jerry building in the city. Only of course Mr Farrelly is very influential in the Corporation. Hence the Syndicate gets the contracts.

MICHAEL. That's a very grave charge to make — and you are taking a great responsibility on yourself in making it.

NOLAN. Well, of course. I am giving you the information as you ask for it, though I am afraid we would look at it from such different standpoints that it would be impossible to convince you. Mr Farrelly's other company, the Foundry Co, is supplying all the ironwork to the Building Syndicate and there will be trouble in that quarter which may affect your asylum rather seriously.

MICHAEL. What's the cause of that?

NOLAN. They want to lower the men's wages two shillings a week and they threaten to bring over foreigners if the workmen don't accept it.

MICHAEL. Do you mean to say Farrelly's Company — he who is so patriotic!

NOLAN. Patriotic! Oh! Yes he's patriotic enough. But it doesn't run to two shillings a week for an Irish workman. Patriotism, — psh — patriotism to the capitalist is for use only at election times. He would put ten per cent dividend, my dear sir, before all the mountains of patriotism you could produce.

MICHAEL (*Settling down in a more calm way*). And aren't you, Mr Nolan, a believer in patriotism?

NOLAN. I believe in Freedom for all and the rule of Labour.

MICHAEL. But there is Capital to be considered as well as Labour.

NOLAN. No Mr O'Loskin, that is a shibboleth of the exploiter.

MICHAEL. But surely Capital ought to have a fair representation?

NOLAN. Capital! What is Capital? The machines, do you mean? You cannot surely give a vote to a steam-engine or consider the feelings of a coal mine.

MICHAEL. No. But the rights of their owners?

NOLAN. Their owners have no rights against the common-weal.

MICHAEL. None?

NOLAN. None, *as owners of capital.* They have rights as men, and as men, they should be treated with the justice due to all men.

MICHAEL. Then they must have their property respected.

NOLAN. Not if it means the robbing of other men's property, the taking away of other men's freedom.

MICHAEL. How do you make that out?

NOLAN. Mr O'Loskin there are two classes of men in every nation — the workers and . . .

MICHAEL. And?

NOLAN. And the drones, the landlords, capitalists, governors and loafers who take without rendering service.

MICHAEL. What then of the rights of these?

NOLAN. The drones! The drones have no rights against the rest. Those who desire to live without working can have no claim to consideration from those who work and often only exist.

(CLERK *enters with a letter.*)

CLERK. Mr O'Loskin, sir. Here's a letter for you sir.

MICHAEL. Will you see, Mr Dale, that those plans go tonight for certain to Wilson's people? They're worrying about them.

CLERK. Yes sir.

NOLAN. Good day Mr O'Loskin.

MICHAEL. Good day Mr Nolan.

(CLERK *shows* NOLAN *out. Both exit.*)

MICHAEL. At any rate, let the odds be what they may, I shall never surrender to corruption.

O'LOSKIN (*Entering*). Michael! I have a word to say to you. Mr Farrelly is greatly put about over your making such a fuss over that mistake at the asylum. You oughtn't to do anything that would displease him.

MICHAEL. Why, father? I must do the work the Corporation pays me for.

O'LOSKIN. Yes. But you won't get on the way you are going. You must have a little discretion.

MICHAEL (*With sarcasm*). Discretion! What do you mean by discretion, father? Surely, if Mr Farrelly has nothing to be ashamed of . . .

O'LOSKIN. Of course he hasn't. But he's chairman, you know, of the New Building Syndicate that's doing the work of the asylum and . . . Well such a thing would reflect on him, you know.

MICHAEL. If Mr Farrelly is not doing anything he oughtn't to . . . (*During the last speech of his father he has opened the letter brought to him by the clerk and started to read it*). If he has done anything wrong . . . (*Reads letter*). My God! (*Goes to table and sits down*).

O'LOSKIN. Michael! What is it?

MICHAEL. Father, Mr Farrelly is a swindler a . . .

O'LOSKIN. Michael!

MICHAEL. Yes, a swindler, a corrupter, a liar. One who uses his public position to rob the city he is supposed to guard. A liar who denies his guilt when brought home to him. A corrupter who thinks to smooth his path by bribing those who stand in his way.

O'LOSKIN. Michael how dare you!

MICHAEL. Why, here is the *proof* of every word I say (*indicating the letter*). This man sends me a cheque for £500, *a wedding present*. Good God! He thinks £500 will buy me.

O'LOSKIN. Michael how dare you talk to me of my friend like that!

MICHAEL. Father is this man one of your friends? Are you of *his* lot? Are you a . . . (*A light breaking on him*). Oh let me think things out. I must get clear as to where I stand with you all. (*Goes out imperiously.*)

O'LOSKIN (*Musing*). What'll be done with that boy at all? I don't know where he got his head-strong will from. He knows too much, I'm afraid — he knows too much.

(*Enter Farrelly.*)

FARRELLY. Well I hope you have been able to settle matters with Michael.

O'LOSKIN. I'm afraid you've put your foot in it entirely. I'm afraid we've made a mistake about Michael and the way of getting round him.

FARRELLY. What do you mean?

O'LOSKIN. Oh, this cheque of yours hasn't had the effect of softening him at all. He is in a terrible rage and the sending of the cheque was the worst thing could have been done. Besides, he had discovered about the Smoky Alley property, and, damn it all, the boy seems to want to fight everybody. We made a terrible mistake Farrelly. I thought Michael took after me. That's the worst of giving a boy a good education.

FARRELLY. Well of course it's very sad O'Loskin that we should have made a mistake. I am sorry. You weren't responsible though. None of us could have foreseen that he would have turned out this way. But of course if he makes himself objectionable to everyone he has to work with, I suppose he will resign. That's all.

O'LOSKIN. Yes, I suppose we will be able to get him to resign; though its a pity to see a lad throwing away a good opportunity like that, £700 a year at the very start and little to do.

(*Enter* MICHAEL.)

MICHAEL (*Coldly*). Oh, Mr Farrelly, are you here? (FARRELLY *goes effusively to* MICHAEL). I am very sorry, Mr Farrelly, that you should have thought it proper to send me that cheque as a wedding present. It was rather clumsy. I have returned it to you, however. You apparently misunderstood me, Mr Farrelly, in thinking I would accept a bribe of that sort?

FARRELLY (*With mock indignation*). A bribe sir! You ought to be careful of your language.

MICHAEL. I should have said a 'wedding present on account of the asylum contract'.

O'LOSKIN. Michael I don't know why you need make yourself so bitter to all your friends.

MICHAEL. Friends indeed! I have been considering the matter, father, and in view of the circumstances I have been thinking of resigning (FARRELLY *and* O'LOSKIN *exchange glances*) my position as City Architect.

FARRELLY. Well of course Mr O'Loskin if you really find yourself unable to discharge your duties . . .

MICHAEL. Too well able, perhaps, for the taste of those with whom I have to work.

FARRELLY. Unable to discharge you duties, perhaps the best thing you could do would be to resign.

O'LOSKIN. Of course, Michael, if the position is preying on your mind, perhaps it would be good for your own health for us to find some other occupation for you which would be more suitable.

FARRELLY. Yes. It might be good for your health, Mr O'Loskin, to avoid all this worry. You seem to annoy yourself over so many little things.

MICHAEL. It might, Mr Farrelly. (*Crosses to centre.*) I said I was *thinking* of resigning until I realized that it would be much better to stay and discharge the duties which I find myself able to grasp more clearly on consideration. I think that in the interests of the people I had better stay.

FARRELLY. If you stay, Mr O'Loskin, you will have to do your work differently from what you have been doing in the past.

MICHAEL. If *I* stay, Mr Farrelly, *you* will have to do *your* work in a different manner.

FARRELLY. What do you mean by 'doing my work in a different manner'? You will never get over that mistake about the foundations?

MICHAEL. It was not a mistake, Mr Farrelly.

FARRELLY. How dare you contradict me, sir! A young puppy that I have put into the job.

MICHAEL. Yes. That was another 'mistake' Mr Farrelly.

FARRELLY (*Changing tone*). Well, really Mr O'Loskin there's no use being such bad friends. Let us be reasonable — let us be calm, let us look at it as men of the world. What happened at the asylum is happening everywhere. The fact is, and you know it perfectly well, that the Corporation cut down the price so much that we would never make a profit otherwise. And no harm is done, no harm is done. The only thing is that slight difference in the foundations, which is of no consequence whatever.

MICHAEL (*Crosses right*). The foundations! That was not all. But that was the chief crime. If the foundations be bad, the whole building is endangered. And you, for a petty gain, undermine the edifice you have undertaken to build. For a few pounds, you destroy the basis and in destroying it, bring down everyone in the ruin.

FARRELLY. Oh you exaggerate, Mr O'Loskin. You exaggerate. The matter is not so serious as all that.

MICHAEL. It *is* so serious Mr Farrelly. We are building a new city and we must build square and sure. In the city of the future, there must be none of the rottenness which you and your class made in the city of old; in the new city you will have no place. (*Crosses to left.* FARRELLY *comes centre.*)

FARRELLY. Indeed, and who will blot us out? And who are you to talk, my young man, you who were born and reared in the old city as you call it? Where did you get your education; where did you get the leisure for developing all these fine ideas? What would you have been if your father hadn't made money out of his tenement property and his public house and his speculation that you are so lofty as to look down on now?

MICHAEL. Perhaps, perhaps, Mr Farrelly, we are all children of the past — you and I and everyone of us. Only some of us look to the future and some of us wish to stay always as we are. The new city will have none of the corruption of the past.

FARRELLY. What new city are we going to build? What do you mean?

MICHAEL Liberty and Truth.

FARRELLY. Oh I don't understand all that sort of talk. You are up in the clouds. (*Breaking in and holding out his hand*). Well, Mr O'Loskin, I don't know what you mean but are we to be friends, Mr O'Loskin, that is the point? (MICHAEL *remains motionless*). If it is to be war between us, I warn you Mr O'Loskin, you will get the worst of it. It would be better for you and me to be friends. (*Goes to the door.* MICHAEL *moves to the left centre*). Are we to be friends, Mr O'Loskin, or is it to be war?

MICHAEL (*Slowly*). I do not compromise. I do not sell myself.

FARRELLY (*Going out*). Then let it be war.

MICHAEL (*Going to his desk*). The city of the future demands it. It can be nothing else but war.

(*Curtain.*)

Brief Mention

Two interesting new publications are *The Penguin Book of Irish Verse,* introduced and edited by Brendan Kennelly, Penguin Books, 1970, price 10s, Canadian $2.15, and, in the Phoenix Living Poets series, P. J. Kavanagh, *About Time,* Chatto & Windus, 1970, price 18s.

This is a single poem in ten sections, giving one individual's reactions to our age, begun with an apologia to his father, and ending with an imaginary conversation with his son. *The Penguin Book of Irish Verse* contains some excellent translations of Gaelic poetry, an admirable selection of 18th and 19th century Anglo-Irish poetry and a wide conspectus of modern poetry written in English by Irishmen.