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MICÍ MAC GABHANN

# Rotha Mór an tSaoil



## **Micí Mac Gabhann** **1865-1948**

### *Life and Literary Status*

Micí Mac Gabhann (1865-1948) was born and raised in Cloich Chionnaola in the West Donegal Gaeltacht, a majority Irish-speaking area of Ireland. His parents had eleven children, and were poor, owning only a little land. Tragedy struck the family when Micí's father was sentenced to a month in prison for the crime of possessing a bottle of póitín in the home (an illicit home-distilled alcohol drink) and he died soon after he was released, with many attributing his death to the poor conditions in the prison. Such was the poverty of his family that nine-year-old Micí was forced into working life in order to provide for his mother and siblings. The poor families of the western Irish-speaking areas in Donegal often travelled to the Lagan Valley, the arable and wealthy area in Eastern Donegal, where their children were 'hired out' to a succession of farmers and families. This was Mac Gabhann's early working life experience, before he spent five seasons in Scotland as a labourer, and then finally travelled to America in 1885.

Mac Gabhann eventually returned to Ireland, and his daughter was married to the eminent folklorist, Seán Ó hEochaidh, in 1943. It is Ó hEochaidh who persuaded Mac Gabhann to tell of his life and adventures as a labourer. His autobiography was published in 1959 as *Rotha Mór an tSaoil*. It was then brought to an English-speaking audience thanks to Valentin Iremonger's translation, *The Hard Road to Klondike*, which was published in 1962.

For further information on Micí Mac Gabhann, see [www.ricorso.net/rx/az-data/authors/Mac/M-Gabhann\\_M/life.htm](http://www.ricorso.net/rx/az-data/authors/Mac/M-Gabhann_M/life.htm)

For information in Irish, see [www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=31](http://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=31)

## **A note on these excerpts**

Although immigrant farm labourers from Ireland were generally successful in bringing back funds for the impoverished families at home, Mac Gabhann's descriptions highlight the poor conditions under which these young men laboured: sleeping on sacks and hard floors, surviving on biscuits and thin gruel while working long hours with little rest. The inevitability of seasonal migration is apparent throughout the text, with many references to people back in Donegal telling tales of hard labour, and serial emigrants going to the boat again and again.

These serial emigrants formed a core social group that often assisted each other while abroad, helping to build networks of support for the labourers. This is apparent in these passages, as the reader gains an insight into the exclusively male sphere of seasonal emigrant labour. What is undeniable, however, is the tight sense of camaraderie experienced by these men as they laboured abroad for their family's survival.

## **Language and translation**

Mac Gabhann's prose is matter-of-fact and quite journalistic for the most part, except when he wanders into thoughts of home and the unfairness and despair of the hard labour that have been the yoke of his people, as seen in the extracts below. The deep connection he has to his native Donegal is obvious and comes across clearly in the forms of dialectal speech in the text.

The translation is faithful to the original in a literal sense. The richness of Mac Gabhann's native Irish is undoubtedly difficult to translate precisely on occasion, and phrases like 'O'Boyle went off with himself' (meaning went off alone) or 'One thing was giving me worry' sound quaint in English to a contemporary reader.

The excerpts from *Rotha Mór an tSaoil* (Indreabhán: Cló Iar-Chonnacht, 1996) are reprinted with the kind permission of Cló Iar-Chonnacht. Excerpts from *The Hard Road to Klondike* (Cork: The Collins Press, 2003) are reprinted with the kind permission of The Collins Press.

## Rotha Mór an tSaoil

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### Mo Chéad Turas Farraige

Chaith muid seal maith i dtigh Davy. Bhí fhios againn go mbeadh sé anonn go maith sa lá sula bhfágadh an bád Doire agus bhí sé comh réidh againn an t-am a chaitheamh ag Davy le bheith ag spaisteoireacht fríd an bhaile sin. Mhealac muid linn ansin ar neart-lá gur bhain muid cé Dhoire amach. Bhí na sluaite ansin ag dul ar an bhád chéanna – daoine as achan chearn de Dhun na nGall agus an siúl céanna fúthu uilig a bhí fúinn féin. Bhí siad ann fir agus mná, aosta agus óg, agus iad uilig ag tabhairt a n-aghaidhe ar Albain féacháil an bhfuigheadh siad obair agus beagán airgid le cosnamh a chuideodh le hiad féin agus an mhuintir a bhí siad a fhágáil ina ndiaidh a choinneáil beo. An chuid acu a bhí anonn in aois agus a fuair blas an bhaile thall cheana féin d’aithneofa nach rabh fonn mór orthu a bheith ag dul chun siúil. Thuig siad nach rabh só ná sócmhal i ndán dóibh go bpilleadh siad. Sinne nach rabh fhios againn a athrach agus a rabh an óige againn cha rabh muid ach mar bheadh ógánaigh a bheadh ag dul chun bainise.

Fuair muid ár gcuid ticéad. Cha rabh siad daor san am – dhá scilling a d’íoc mise agus bhí leathchoróinn fágtha agam. Caitheadh go leor ama ag cur bollógaí agus earraí ar bord an tsoithigh; cuireadh muid féin ar bord ansin i gcuideachta an eallaigh agus scaoileadh an bád síos Loch Feabhail. Cha mb’fhiú trácht ar chumhaidh Choluim Cille an lá a bhí sé ag fágáil na hÉireann ón chuan chéanna seo le taobh an dóigh a bhí ar chuid dá rabh ar an tsoitheach sin.

Bhí achan rud ceart go leor i dtaca le holc fhad agus a bhí muid ar an támhall ach nuair a chuaigh muid amach ar an duibheagán thosaigh an bogadach agus an rollacadh. Bhí an ghaoth aniar aduaidh san am sin i ngualainn an tsoithigh agus farraige mhaith throm ann. Siud agus gur thógadh chois farraige mé fein char chuir mé mo chos ar bhád ariamh go dtí sin. Bhí me i mo shuí thíos i dtoiseach an tsoithigh agus nuair a thosaigh an bhogadach dar liom go rabh mo cheann ag éirí éadrom agus mo ghoile ar tí tiontó orm. Cha rabh i bhfad go rabh comrádaithe go leor agam ach siud agus go rabh mé tinn go maith cha dtáinig urla ar bith orm. Bhí Dia ag amharc ar an oíche a chuir mé isteach idir thinneas agus thromas agus ag coimhead ar dhaoine eile a bhí ní ba mheasa ná mé fein. Dáiríre bhí me aon am amháin agus ba mhaith liom dá dtéadh an long síos go tóin. Bhí mé caite ansin slaom slam agus ba chuma liom cé acu tífinn talamh nó tráigh go brách nó nach bhfeicfinn.

Bhí muid istigh ag cé Ghlasú thart fan sé a chlog ar maidin. Ba í an chéad cheist ansin cén taobh a rabh muid ag dul a thabhairt ar n-aghaidhe, cén áit a bhfuighimis rud ínteacht le déanamh ann. Bhí Conall comh haineolach agus a bhí mé féin fá na gnoithe seo, ach fhad agus a bhí muid ag fanacht ar an ché i nDoire an tráthnóna roimh ré thit muid chun seanchais le fear as na Rosa – fear breá arbh aimn dó Pádraig Ó Baoill. Bhí sé meánaosta agus d’aithin muid ar an éideadh a bhí air gur ag pilleadh anonn a bhí sé. Chuir muid caint air

agus dúirt sé linn go rabh sé ag obair in oibreacha móra an iarainn i gCoatbridge leis na blianta agus go rabh sé breá sásta ansin. I Lanarkshire atá Coatbridge, tuairim ar naoi nó deich de mhílte soir ó Ghlaschú. Thóg comhlacht Baird na Gartsherrie Iron Works ansin agus ar feadh blianta ba iad sin na hoibreacha iarainn ab ainmniúla sna trí ríochtaí. Cha rabh a dhath dá dtiocfadh leat a ainmniú ón tairne go dtí an t-ancuire mór nach rabh ag teacht as a gcuid sorn, ach má bhí, bhí allas á chailleadh ina gcuid monarchana. Bhí an obair maslach agus na huaireannaí fada ach b'fhearr é ná leath do shaoil a chaitheamh ar an 'tramp' ag cuartú oibre fríd na Lothians agus ó sin go crích na Sasan.

'An mbeadh seans ar bith againne rud ínteacht a fháil le déanamh ann?' arsa mise leis an Bhaollach, 'dá dtéimis suas?'

'Bhail, cha dtig liomsa freagar dhíreach a thabhairt ar do cheist,' ar seisean, 'ach tá mé breá mór leis an fhear a bhfuil cúram na n-oibríonnaí air agus má théid sibh an bealach labharfaidh me leis ar bhur son.'

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#### Soir go Coatbridge

Nuair a d'fhág achan duine an bád maidin an lae a bhain muid Glascú amach, d'imigh an Baollach leis agus chan fhaca muid é ní ba mhó an iarraidh sin. Chuaigh sinn féin suas an baile agus chaith muid seal ag amharc thart. Chonaic muid brioscaí á ndíol i siopa ansin ar leithphingin an ceann a rabh sáith fear ar bith iontu. Cheannaigh muid cupla ceann an fear acu sin agus chuir inár bpócaí iad. Chuir muid ár gcomhairle i gcionn a chéile ansin agus shocraigh muid gur ar Coatbridge ab fhearr dúinn tarraingt. Bhí sé lan luath go fóill le dhul a dh'obair ar na feirmeacha agus smaointigh muid go mb'fhéidir go bhfuighimis rud ínteacht eile le dhéanamh go mbeadh lár an tsamhraidh ann.

Chuir muid tuairisc an bhealaigh, tugadh sin dúinn agus lig muid linn. Cha rabh eolas ag ceachtar againn ar an tír agus cha rabh fhios againn san am cé acu fada nó gairid an turas a bhí romhainn. Bhí rud amháin a bhí ag cur inní orm féin. Chluininn na seandaoine a bhí anonn is anall go hAlbain blianta roimhe seo ag trácht ar bhaile bheag a dtéadh siad fríd nuair a bhíodh said ag tarraingt ar an fhómhar – baile a dtugadh siad Armadale air. Sna laetha sin chaitheadh muintir na háite s'againne brístí agus scaoilteofaí móra de bháinín baile agus cha rabh áit ar bith a dtéadh siad nach mbíodh fhios gurbh iad a bhí ann. Cibé fuath a bhí ag bunadh an bhaile sin orthu, is cosúil go dtosnaíodh siad a chaitheamh buidéal agus cloch orthu achan am a bhfeiceadh siad iad.

Chaitheadh na fir s'againne san am sin a gcuid corrán a bheith anonn leo agus bhíodh ságán casta thart ar an lann acu ar eagla go ndéanfadh siad dochar ar bith léi; ach nuair a bhíodh siad ag tarraingt ar an bhaile seo bhaineadh siad na ságáin de na corráin sa dóigh a mbeadh siad réidh le troid dá ndéanfadh scaimhearaithe an

bhaile ionsaí orthu. Bhí eagla ormsa go mbeadh orainne a dhul fríd an bhaile sin ach, ádhmharach go leor, cha rabh – bhí sé ní b'fhaide soir.

Cha rabh fhios againne sin san am, ar ndóigh, agus shiúil muid linn go faichilleach. Bhí seanbhróga orainn agus leoga cha rabh cleachtadh mór againn orthu agus ba ghairid go deachaigh siad a mhilleadh na gcos againn. Cha dearn muid ach suí síos ar ghruaibhín an bhealaigh mhóir agus iad a stealladh dinn. Chaith muid trasna ar ár nguailleacha iad ansin agus threabhaigh linn costarnocht. Dálta na mban a mbíodh na bróga ar iompar leo fad ó shin nuair a bhíodh siad ag tarraingt ar Aifreann an Domhnaigh agus a chuireadh orthu iad ag Droicheadh na Cailí taobh amuigh de Ghort an Choirce, shuigh muid síos gur chuir muid orainn ar ais iad taobh amuigh de bhaile mhór Coatbridge. D'ith muid na brioscaí a cheannaigh muid sa tsíopa, agus nuair a bhí sin déanta againn tharraing muid ar an bhaile mhór agus ar oibreacha an iarainn. Bhí cuid mhór i gceart fear le feiceáil ansin agus cuma orthu uilig a bheith an-ghnoitheach. Chuir muid tuairisc an Bhaollaigh agus thug stócach beag fhad leis sinn. Bhí sé ina chraiceann, féadaim a rá, ag stealladh mianaigh comh tiubh agus a tháinig leis isteach i gceann de na soirn. Nuair a chonaic mé é ansin báite ina chuid allais, dar liom dá bhfaighinnse obair mar sin féin, cha bheinn ábalta a seasamh i bhfad.

D'aithin an Baollach muid in áit na mbonn, scairt sé ar fhear eile a bhí ina sheasamh ann agus d'iarr sé air a áit a líonadh fhad is a bheadh sé ag labhairt linne. Bhí fhios aige go maith, ar ndóigh, caidé an siúl a rabh muid ann. Thug sé leis sinn araon isteach in oifig bheag a bhí ann agus d'inis sé don fhear a bhí istigh ansin gur stócaigh sinn a bhí ar lorg oibre – cairde dó féin – agus dá dtigeadh leis rud ínteacht a thabhairt dúinn le déanamh go mbeadh sé an-bhuíoch dó. Chuir an fear ceist orainn cár bh aois muid agus nuair a d'inis muid dó, ar seisean:

‘Tá sibh óg, ach mar sin fein b'fhéidir go dtiocfaidh liom rud ínteacht a fháil díbh le déanamh.’

D'fhág an Baollach muid ansin agus dúirt go bhfeicfeadh sé muid in am stad. Thug fear na hoifige leis muidinne agus d'iarr ar fhear eile dhá bhara a fháil dúinn.

‘Anois,’ ar seisean, ‘siúlaigí liomsa.’

Shiúil, agus thug sé muid ár mbeirt chuig áit a rabh cruach mhianaigh a bhí comh hard leis an Eargal.

‘Anois,’ ar seisean, ‘má tá foinn oibre oraibh tig libh a dhul a thiomáint an mhianaigh sin fhad leis an tsorn sin thall. Gheobhaidh sibh deich scilling sa tseachtain ó Luan go Satharn. Tig libh bhur gcomhairle féin a dhéanamh anois ach mura dtaitníonn sin libh níl neart agamsa oraibh.’

D'amharc fear againn ar an fhear eile agus ba é an smaointiú a rinne muid glacadh leis an obair seo. Chuaigh muid araon i gcionn na mbaráí. Cha rabh lóistín ná rud ar bith socraithe againn ach bhí fhios againn nach ligfeadh an Baollach dúinn codladh amuigh. Nuair a tháinig am scaoilte casadh orainn é agus d'fhiafraigh muid de an dtiocfadh leis ár seoladh in áit ar bith a bhfuighimis lóistín. Dúirt sé go dtiocfadh. Thug sé an bheirt

againn leis agus d'fhág sé sinn socraithe síos ag bean as Anagaire a choinníodh lóisteoirí ar an bhaile. Bhí an báire linn ansin: bhí obair againn agus greim le hithe agus leabaidh le sinn féin a shíneadh inti. Leoga cha rabh ár leabaidh deacair a chóiriú an oíche sin agus b'orainn a bhí an lúcháir nuair a shín muid ár gcnámha inti – an chéad oíche in Albain agus ár gcéad lá páighe saothraithe againn mar 'fhir fásta' ag treabhadh as ár ruball féin.

D'oibir muid linn ag tiomáint an mhianaigh ach cha rabh rún ar bith againn fanacht sa mhonarchain seo. Bhí muid ag feitheamh go cruaidh ar mhí Mheáin an tSamhraidh. Bhí fhios againn go mbíodh na fir a théadh anonn a thanú na dturnapaí ag dréim a bheith thuas fá Bherwickshire i dtrátha an dóú lá fichead den mhí Mheáin. Ba é sin an t-am a mbíodh siad ag dúil go mbeadh obair le fáil acu ag tanú. Thigeadh corrbhliain ceart go leor nach mbíodh na turnapaí réidh san am sin agus d'fhágadh sin seachtain chruaidh nó níos mó ag na creatúir a bhíodh ag feitheamh ar an obair. Bhíos mórán den obair déanta fá bhaile ag na fir seo sula n-imíodh siad – an dubhbair ar aon chaoi. Bhíodh an barr ar bhealach mhaith acu agus an mhóin bainte. Chaithfeadh na mná agus na paistí an chuid eile a dhéanamh nuair a bhíodh siadsan ar shiúl. Ach bhí mná thart sa pharóiste s'againne san am sin a d'oibreadh fear ar bith agus cha rabh obair ar bith nach dtáinig le cuid acu a dhéanamh – fiú tuí a chur ar theach.

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### Bonnington Farm

Ba ghnách le cuid den mhuintir s'againne blianta roimhe seo oibriú ar fheirm a dtugadh said Bonnington Farm uirthi agus nuair a bhí mé féin agus Conall ag tarraingt ar Dhún Báirr shocraigh muid go rachaimis ar thuairisc na háite sin. Rinne muid sin agus gan trioblóid ar bith d'éirigh linn a baint amach. Cha rabh an gabháltas comh mór leis na cinn a bhí thart air. Tuairim ar shé chéad acaire a bhí ann agus mura bhfuil meath mór ar mo chuimhne, sílim gur Young ab ainm don fhear ar leis é. Labhair sé linn go hiontach carthanach, ach cá bith mar bhí Béarla an Lagáin cha dtuigfeadh an mac mallacht an teanga a bhí aige seo. D'éirigh linn a inse dó ar scor ar bith caidé bhí ag cur bhuartha orainn.

'Bhail,' adeir sé (agus tá mé ag cur mo chanúna féin ar an rud a thuig mé uaidh), 'tá an t-ádh oraibh. Tá mo chuid turnapaí réidh le tanú lá ar bith acu seo agus bhí mé go díreach ag feitheamh ar chuid de mhuintir na tíre s'agaibhse a theacht an bealach go gcuirinn ar obair iad. Siúlai gí libh síos anseo go dtaispeána mé an bhotáí díbh.'

Chuaigh sinne síos leis. Bhain sé an glas den doras agus bhí Dia féin ag amharc ar an áras a bhí ansin romhainn. Bhí seanleabaidh thuas i gcoirnéal na bothóige a rabh gráinnín cocháin caite inti agus dornán de shaic gharbha air sin. Ba í sin an leabaidh a bheadh againne. Bhí conamar guail caite sa chlódaigh eile.

'Creidim, a bhuachaillí,' aras an máistir linn féin, 'go bhfuil ocras oraibh anois i ndiaidh an tsiúil.'

‘Bhail, níl muid saor,’ arsa sinne as béal a chéile.

‘Tá go maith,’ ar seisean, ‘rachaidh mé suas chun tí agus bhéarfaidh mé rud ínteacht chugaibh a íosfas sibh. Ó sin amach, tig libh amharc ‘bhur ndiaidh féin.’

D’imigh sé leis agus chan fhada uilig a bhí sé ar shiúl gur phill sé agus dornán mine coirce agus dhá bhabhal agus braon bainne leis.

‘Anois,’ a deir sé, ‘tig libh an bainne a mheascadh leis an mhin coirce agus bróis a dhéanamh de. Dhéanfaidh sin cúis díbh go bhfaighidh sibh féin rud ínteacht. Féadfaidh sibh a dhul amach i gcionn na dturnapaí ar maidin amárach.’

D’fhág sé ansin muid.

Char chuala sinne trácht ar an bhróis Albanach udaí go dtí seo. Chuala muid fán cháfraith agus fá mhórán cineál eile bróiseanna a níodh siad fá bhaile ach chan fhaca muid an mhin choirce fhuar ariamh á meascadh leis an bhainne agus cha rabh fonn mór orainn an phroinn seo a ithe. Bhí cupla briosca go fóill linn inár bpóca agus d’ith muid iad leis an bhainne fhuar. D’amharc muid fá dtaobh dínnsin, ghlán muid suas an bhotaí comh maith agus a tháinig linn agus chóirigh muid sórt leapa dúinn féin. D’imigh muid amach ansin ar lorg siopa. Chuartaigh muid linn go dtáinig muid ar cheann fá dheireadh tuairim ar chupla míle uainn. Cheannaigh muid giota aráin ansin agus bhí focal an mháistir againn go bhfuighimis ár sáith bainne sa teach mhór. Fuair.

Chuaigh muid fá chónaí go luath an oíche sin. Bhí muid tuirseach agus bhí fhios againn go gcaithfimis a bheith ar ár gcois leis an scarthanaigh. B’fhíor é. I dtrátha a sé a chlog maidin lá thar na mhárach, agus muid inár gcodladh, buaileadh straiméid an fhuinneoig agus chuir fear amuigh guldar as go raibh an t-am againn a bheith ag bogadaigh má bhí rún againn a dhul i gcionn oibre. Chaith orainn ansin agus nuair a d’ith muid giota aráin mar shnathadh leis an bhainne a tugadh dúinn chuaigh muid amach. Bhí an báillí ina sheasamh ansin ag fanacht linn agus thug sé leis chun na páirce sinn. Bhí sin ann páirc bhreá. Measaim gan bhréig gan áibhéil go rabh céad acaire faoi thurnapaí inti. Cuireadh isteach ina cionn sin muid. Leoga cha rabh mórán cleachtaithe againn ar an tanú ach char dheacair foghlaim. Dhá scilling an t-acaire a bhí as an obair sin agus níl feidhm domh a rá go mbeadh stócaigh nach rabh ach ag tosú tamall fada ag déanamh a bhfortúin uirthi.

D’oibir muid linn mar sin agus cha rabh i bhfad go rabh muintir Chloch Cheannfhaola ag teacht ina sluaite. Cha rabh de dhíobháil san áit a rabh sinne ach beirt eile go dtí an fómhar. Fuair an chéad beirt a tháinig an obair – Séamas Ó Gallchobhair agus Micí Mac Suibhne. Bhí seanaithne ag an mháistir orthu agus ar ndóigh bhí aithne againn féin orthu. Tá an beirt ar shlua na marbh leis na blianta. Bhí Séamas mórán de shé troithe go leith ar airde agus fear an-ghreannmhar a bhí ann. Nuair a chonaic sé na saic ar an leabaidh a rabh sé ag dul a luí inti chuaigh sé ar an daoraigh. Tharraing sé ar an teach mhór gur iarr sé plaincéid agus chan é amháin go

bhfuair sé cupla seancheann dúinne fosta. Nuair a d'éirigh sé ar maidin lá thar na mhárach chuir mé ceist air caidé mar chodail sé an oíche sin.

'Char chodail mé chor ar bith,' arsa Séamas.

'Caidé ba chiall duit?' arsa mise.

'Ó tá' ar seisean, 'bhí mo phlaincéad róghairid, ach seal mise a theacht isteach anocht dhéanfaidh mé fada go leor é.'

Nuair a bhí an lá istigh agus tháinig muid isteach ar ais chun na botáí, shuigh Séamas síos gur chaith sé toit agus go dearn sé a scíste. Nuair a bhí sin déanta aige tharraing sé ar an leabaidh agus thóg leis an plaincéad amach a chois na tineadh. Tharraing sé scian phóca amach agus chuir sé scor i lár an phlaincéid. Rug sé air ansin agus rois sé é ó bhun go barr. Bhí snáthad agus snáithe aige fosta – mar a bhíodh ag na seanlámha uilig a bhíodh anonn is anall go hAlbain. Cha bhíodh mórán éadaí leo agus nuair a strócadh siad ball chaithfeadh siad dóigh a bheith orthu paiste nó greim a chur. Bhíodh na comhgair i gcónaí leo. Thug Séamas dhá leath an phlaincéid do chéile ar scor ar bith agus bhí sé fada go leor aige an oíche sin.



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VALENTIN IREMONGER

# The Hard Road to Klondike



Translated from  
**Rotha Mór an tSaoil**  
by Micí Mac Gabhann

## **The Hard Road to Klondike**

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### **My First Sea Journey**

We spent a good while with Davy. We knew that the day would be well gone by the time the boat left Derry and it was just as well for us to spend the time with Davy as to spend it wandering around the town. In due course we strolled over to the quay of Derry. There were crowds of people getting on to the same boat – people from every corner of Donegal all bent on the same mission as ourselves. There they were, men and women, young and old, all off to Scotland looking for work to gather a bit of money to keep themselves and the families they were leaving behind them alive. You could see that the older ones, who already had tasted the foreign parts, had no great wish to be on the move again. They knew that they would have neither ease nor peace until they returned. But we were young, we didn't know any better and we were like young people going to a feast.

We got our tickets. They weren't dear then – I paid two shillings and I had a half-crown left over. A lot of the time went by while they were loading up the boat with bullocks and goods; we were then put on board among the cattle and the boat made off down Lough Foyle. The grief of Columbkille leaving Ireland from the self-same harbour was hardly worth talking about when you saw the state some of those poor people on the boat were in.

Everything was right enough while we were in the channel but as soon as we got out to sea the pitching and the tossing started. The wind was blowing from the north-west against the shoulder of the ship and a heavy sea accompanied it. Even though I had been reared beside the sea, I had never put my foot in a boat before this. I was sitting in the front of the ship and when the pitching started I thought my head was getting light and that my stomach was turning over. It wasn't long until I had plenty of companions and though I was sick enough I wasn't vomiting. God was watching the night that I spent between sickness and depression particularly from looking at those who were worse than I was. Indeed, there was one period when I longed for the ship to sink straight away to the bottom of the sea. I lay there wretched and weak and I didn't care if I never saw dry land again!

We got into Glasgow quay sometime about six o'clock in the morning. The first question then was which direction should we go in – where would we be likely to get something to do. Conal was as ignorant as I was myself about this part of the business, but while we had been standing on the quay at Derry the day beforehand we got into conversation with a man from the Rosses – a fine man named Paddy O'Boyle. He was middle-aged and we knew by his clothes that he was going back to Scotland. We questioned him and he told us that he was working in the big iron works at Coatbridge. He had been there for years and was well satisfied

with it. Coatbridge is in Lanarkshire about nine or ten miles east from Glasgow. The Baird Company built the Gartsherrie Iron Works there and for many a long year they were the most famous ironworks in the three kingdoms. There was nothing you could think of from nails to huge anchors that didn't come out of their enormous furnaces but if that was the case there was plenty of sweat being lost in their factories. The work was heavy and the hours long but it was better than spending half your life tramping the Lothians and down to England looking for work.

'Would we have any chance of getting a start there,' I asked O'Boyle, 'if we made our way up there?'

'Well,' he said, 'I can't give you a straight answer on that but I'm friendly with the foreman and if you come up there, I'll put in a word for you.'

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#### East to Coatbridge

As the people disembarked from the boat when we reached Glasgow, O'Boyle went off with himself and we didn't see any more of him at that time. We strolled up town and spent some time looking around. We saw biscuits on sale in a shop for a halfpenny each and one of them would do any man for a meal. We bought a couple each and stuck them in our pockets. After that, we put our heads together and decided that the best thing for us to do was to go east to Coatbridge. It was too early to start work on a farm and we thought we might pick up something that would do us until about the middle of summer.

We asked and got directions and started on our way. Neither of us had the remotest idea about the country and, whether long or short the journey, we hadn't an inkling. One thing was giving me some worry. I used to hear the older people who had been to and from Scotland years before talking about a village they passed through on their way to the harvesting – a place called Armadale. In those days, people from our place used to wear breeches and great-coats made from home-spun bawneen and no matter where they went they were recognized as being from our area. Whatever hatred the people of Armadale conceived for them, it appears that that they would attack our people with bottles and stones anytime they saw them. Our men at that time had to bring their sickles over with them and they used to bind the blade with rope so that no damage would be done; but coming towards Armadale, they'd take the rope off the sickle so as to be ready to fight if the toughs of the village started attacking them. I was afraid that we might have to go by that village but, luckily enough, we didn't – it lay further on westwards.

We didn't know that at the time, however, so we walked warily. We had a couple of pairs of old boots on us and as we weren't used to wearing them it wasn't long until our feet were hurting. Well, we sat down on the side of the road and took them off. We threw them over our shoulders and forged ahead bare-foot. Then, like the women who carried their boots going to Sunday Mass and who put them on at Colleybridge, outside

Gortahork, we put ours on again outside Coatbridge. We ate the biscuits we had bought in the shop and when our repast was over we went into the town and headed for the iron-works. There was a right lot of men to be seen there and they all looked very busy. We asked for O'Boyle and a boy brought us to him. He was almost in his skin, I can tell you, loading ore as fast as he could into one of the furnaces. When I saw him there bathed in sweat, I thought to myself that even if I got a job, I'd never be able to stick it for very long.

O'Boyle recognized us immediately and he called to another man to take his place while he was talking to us. He knew well, of course, what brought us there. He brought the pair of us into a little office and told the man there that we were two young fellows looking for work – friends of his own – and said that if anything could be found for us, he'd be very grateful. The man asked us where we were from and when we told him, he said, 'you're both very young but I'll see what I can do.'

O'Boyle left us there and said that he'd see us at knocking-off time. The man in the office told us to follow him and he ordered another man to get us two barrows.

'Now,' he said, 'come along here.'

Off we went and he brought the two of us to a part of the works where there was a heap of ore as high as Errigal.

'Now,' he said, 'if you want work, you can barrow that ore over to that furnace. You'll be paid ten shillings a week from Monday to Saturday. Think over it now but if you don't take it there's nothing more I can do for you.'

We looked at one another and made up our minds instantly to take the job. We took hold of the barrows. We hadn't arranged lodgings or anything else but we knew that O'Boyle wouldn't let us sleep out. When we knocked off, we met him and asked him if he had any address where we could try for lodgings. He said he had. He took us along with him and settled us with a woman from Annagry who kept lodgers. We were as well off as we could be then; we had work, a bit to eat, and a bed of our own to stretch out on. I tell you, we didn't find making the bed too hard that night; and you can imagine our satisfaction as we stretched our bones in it – our first night in Scotland and our first day's pay earned as grown men making their own way.

We worked away shunting the ore but neither of us had any intention of staying in the works. We were waiting impatiently for the month of June. We knew that the men who came over thinning the turnips were expected in Berwickshire about the twenty-second of that month. That was about the time they'd be hoping to get work at the thinning. An odd year, it would happen that the turnips wouldn't be ready by then and that meant a week's hardship or more for the poor creatures while they waited on work. Most of the work at home – of the heavy work, anyhow – would have been done by them before leaving. Many crops would be saved and the turf cut. The woman and children would have to look after the rest while the men were away. But there were

women in our parish that would work as well as any man and there was nothing that some of them couldn't do – even to thatching a house.

Bonnington Farm

Some of our people worked for years at a place they called Bonnington Farm and as Conal and I drew near Dunbar we thought we'd go looking for that place. We did that and without much trouble indeed we found it. The holding wasn't as big as those around it. About six hundred acres it was in extent and unless my memory is failing me altogether I think that Young was the name of the man that owned it. He spoke to us nicely enough but whatever about the English on the Lagan, you wouldn't understand a word out of this man's mouth. We managed to let him know, however, what it was we wanted.

'Well,' he said (and I tell in my own words what I understood him to say). 'You're in luck. My turnips are ready for thinning any day now and I was just waiting for some of the people from your parts to come and start work on them. Come along with you now and I'll show you your quarters.'

Down we went with him. He unlocked the door and God himself would have taken a second look at what we saw in front of us. There was an old bed up in the corner of the hut with a few fistfuls of hay and a big of rough sacking thrown on it. That was to be our bed. There were a few bits of coal in the other corner.

'I suppose now,' said the master to us, 'that you're a bit hungry now after your walk?'

'We are that,' we said together.

'Fair enough,' he replied, 'I'll go up to the house now and bring you back something to eat. After that, you can look after yourselves.'

Off he went and it wasn't long until he came back with a bit of oatmeal and a couple of bowls and some milk.

'Now,' he said, 'you can mix the milk with the oatmeal and make some gruel. That will keep you going until you get something for yourselves. You can get out on the turnips tomorrow morning.'

He left us alone then.

We had never heard about this Scottish gruel beforehand. We had known many other kinds of gruel that they made at home but we had never seen the cold oatmeal mixed with milk now, nor, had we any great desire to eat it. In our pockets we still had a couple of biscuits and we ate those with the cold milk. Then we started to look around us, we cleaned up the bothy as well as we could and made a bed of sorts for ourselves. Off we went then looking for a shop. We searched around until at least we found one a couple of miles from where we

were. We bought some bread there and, after all, we had the master's word that we'd have plenty of milk in the house. Which we had.

We went to bed early that night. We were worn out and we knew that we'd have to be on our feet at the crack of dawn. And it was true. At six o'clock the following morning while we were still asleep, there was a loud knocking on the window and someone outside calling that it was time to be moving if we were going to do any work. We dressed quickly and having eaten a bit of the bread to sop up the milk that we were given, out we moved. The bailiff was standing there waiting for us and he took us along to the field. And a fine field it was. Without any lie or exaggeration there must have been a hundred acres there under turnips. We were set at them. To be sure, we hadn't any experience of thinning but it wasn't hard to learn. Two shillings an acre was being paid for this work and I can tell you that young lads starting there would be a long time making their fortunes.

We worked away and it wasn't long until the people from Cloghaneely were arriving in hordes. In the place we were, only two men were needed until autumn. The first two who came got the work – James Gallagher and Micky Sweeney. The master knew them of an old date and, of course, we knew them also. The two of them are dead now this good number of years. James was about six feet high and a droll fellow he was indeed. When he saw the old sacking on the bed, he became very critical and went straight up to the house to look for blankets; not only did he get one each for himself and his companion but he also got a couple of old ones for us. When he arose next morning, I asked him how he had slept.

'Sure, I didn't sleep at all,' he said.

'What was wrong with you?' I asked.

'O,' said he, 'my blanket was too short but when I come in tonight, I'll make it long enough.'

When the day was done and when we had come back in to the bothy, James sat down and had a smoke and a rest. After that, he went over to the bed and brought the blanket over by the fire. He took out a pocket-knife then and nicked the middle of the blanket. He seized it then and ripped it from top to toe. He had a needle and thread – as all the old hands who had been in Scotland before had. They usedn't have much clothes and when they'd tear them they'd have to be able to put a patch on them here and there. And they always had the necessary tools. James stitched the two pieces of blanket together anyhow and it was long enough for him that night.