IRISH "MOUNTAIN DEW"

By Seumas MacManus

IN the Irish section of the St. Louis Exposition I fear there was an Irish exhibit lacking, to wit.: poteen, or Irish "Mountain Dew." I do not know why it should not have been given a show alongside the commonplace legalized Irish whiskies which were there, for I know that if the "Mountain Dew" be real "Mountain Dew," well-made from barley in the good old style, with the flavor of the turf smoke and the scent of the heather about it, it would gladden many an exile's heart, and give many an ennuyé American a new interest in life; for on the word of authorities who are authorities I can say that the Irish "Mountain Dew" far excels any other elixir *vitæ* ever known to the old alchemists. I have heard connoisseurs (men who knew what they were talking about) descant upon the merits of Irish poteen, buried two years in the earth—its heart-warming, soul-stirring and palate-pleasing virtues—till streams of saliva voluntarily ran from the mouths of the spellbound listeners. I truly think that Irish poteen would have been a *desideratum* at the world's exposition of 1904.

Photo by R. Welch, Belfast

Poteen-Making in Connemara—Children Watching the Still

I hardly know why it is that for a long time the Irishman was supposed to be preëminently a whisky drinker. I think the misapprehension arose chiefly from the fact that the Irishman more quickly publishes to the world when he has taken a glass of liquor. Whisky goes to the stomach of an Englishman, making him gloat; to the feet of the Scotchman, making him steady and more deliberate; to the head of an Irishman, who as he feels the fun of it in his own generous way wants to share the fun with all the world.

"I am now sixty years of age" said a grave and moral magistrate, reprimanding a prisoner who was before him on a charge of intemperance, "and I was never drunk yet. What do you think of that?"

"Faith, sir, I don't think you know all the fun that's before you," was the jocose reply. He was an Irishman.

A Scottish minister was reproving a whisky-drinking member of his flock, and he said: "It must be a dreadful feeling for a man to be drunk."

"Och, meenister," Rob replied, "if you were onct richte drunk you'd never want to be sober eny mare."

Another cause why the world believed that the Irishman was a whisky drinker was, I think, that among the gentry of Ireland till sixty or seventy years ago were a hard-riding, quick-fighting, whisky-drinking class, and as this class and its manners figured largely in the Irish novel of former days, outsiders have based their opinions of Irish life only upon the descriptions of these people which they read.

John O'Leary of Dublin, one of those striking and interesting relics of Fenian days, and a last link of the extremely old times, tells of being with his father on a social visit to one of the fast-living squires. This latter ordered the elder O'Leary to give the child, his son, a drink of the whisky, that of course was going around.

Mr. O'Leary indignantly objected, saying: "Would you give whisky to a boy like that?"

"My dear fellow," said the host, "it will be the greatest mistake of your life if you do not begin giving it to him now. This is the very best time to make the boy's head." And he added: "It is not the first time I have seen fathers like you spoil their sons, who grow up not fit to carry their drink with decency."

It may be news then to most Americans to learn that our Irish people as a rule are far from being whisky drinkers. They are, in fact, a remarkably sober people, never tippling or indulging in liquor except on special occasions. When they travel to a fair or a market, and there meet a neighbor far from home, it is, as they say, "no shame to go in and have a treat with you"; indeed, according to our laws of hospitality, it would be a black shame to pass by a neighbor without asking him has he a mouth on him. At a wedding or a christening, at a match-making or a barn, a glass of whisky naturally would be indulged in: they do not drink whisky in their homes except on such special occasions.

Of all drinks, poteen was at one time the universal favorite—poteen, the drink which has never been overlooked by the evil eye of the gager, and never been baptized by a legalized publican or a publican inclined to be liberal in the water sprinkling. The good poteen of the old times was always made from barley. The bags of barley were sunk and soaked for many days in many a river pool, and then, spread out on the barn floor and on the point of germinating, were turned and again re-turned in preparation for the brewing.

The still-house, wherein at length the barley-corn spirit was crushed from the running, was generally excavated from the hillside, and so completely covered up and hidden that no still-hunting "peeler" (policeman) could easily discover it. A neighboring streamlet was tapped, and a portion of it carried downward, running in a rill through the underground still-house to supply the water necessary for the operations, and then from the underground pipe the rill was discharged again to its parent stream. Brewing was carried out in a primitive fashion; but in a fashion that if still pursued would retain to the liquor all its virtues — if good temperance crusaders will allow me to say so.

When any man was making a "running" of poteen, all the country-side of course was aware of the fact—police only, the gager, or the excise-man (if there was one in the neighborhood), were left utterly in the dark. Everyone, big and small, if they so wished, went to the still-house to witness the running, and always in the still-house at such times was a merry gathering. A joke was cracked, a song sung, and a merry story went around and gaiety reigned supreme. The story that went best at such times was that of how when on some critical occasion the still-hunting "peeler" was outwitted by the clever distiller and the distiller's still more clever wife. Drafts of the "first shot" of the first spirits condensed were coveted and liberally served around. The old men of the country-side too, if rheumatism or any other "ism" or ache troubled them, had messengers there with bottles waiting for a supply of this "first shot"—a supreme remedy not merely for rheumatism, but every ache or pain the flesh is heir to.

On these occasions, every household in the country-side was an ex-officio sentry, keeping a sharp lookout for the coming of either policeman or gager, and who sounded or sent speedy warning if the form of any doubtful character blurred the horizon. Barefooted and swift-footed youths in addition were posted upon the neighboring hills, and each of these youths was as alert as a reindeer, and had the eye of a hawk, and it was almost impossible for an unexpected invasion to come on the still-house. When the whisky had been run and put in kegs, these kegs generally were buried for concealment in a neighboring bog until opportunity arrived for marketing. The best poteen whisky then was sold for about one dollar and a half a gallon, even less.

The path of the illicit distiller is not an easy one, as far as the authorities can help to make it otherwise. Still-hunting policemen are incessantly on the prowl, and God help the poor poteen-maker who happens to get into the clutches of the law! A mere possessor of poteen too is liable to a heavy fine.

Mr. McLean, the magistrate, was inordinately severe upon any illicit distiller brought up before him. The only thing that tempered Mr. McLean's severity was a timely present of the stuff itself, for his one weakness was a poteen-formed palate. Many a keg of poteen (ill-grudged to him indeed) mysteriously found its way into his cellar, and after he had quieted his conscience by sending one distiller to jail he invited his brother magistrates to his home to partake of a jorum of the brew. But the distiller knew well that Justice was blind: her open hand was always to be discovered behind her back.

One day a poor countryman with a keg of whisky slung upon his back, to his great consternation, turning the corner of a hill came plump against Mr. McLean riding on horseback.

"And so, my good fellow," said the magistrate triumphantly, "I suppose it is only buttermilk you have in that keg?"

The poor countryman had assumed a look of simplicity. "No, sir," he said respectfully, "it is poteen."

"Ha! And where are you fetching it, pray?"

"Och! It is just a little present that I was sent to carry to Mr. McLean, the magistrate," said the man, assuming complete ignorance of the identity of whom he spoke to.

"A-h-a!" said Mr. McLean, suddenly altering his tongue.

"And,' said the poor countryman, "I am only afeared I will meet with some scoundrel of a policeman or gager or bad magistrate, that will arrest me with it."

"Good fellow," said Mr. McLean, fumbling in his pocket and drawing forth a key, "I am Mr. McLean; here's the key of my cellar. When you reach my house give the key to the servant and order him to put in the keg there, and here's a half-crown for yourself, my poor fellow. If you meet with any policeman or gager, just show him my key and tell him your errand. I will warrant no one will dare to molest you."

The poor man thanked Mr. McLean, and went forward to his journey's end, sold his keg of whisky, and then proceeded to Mr. McLean's house, told the servant that his master had ordered him to produce a keg of poteen (which the countryman knew well was in Mr. McLean's cellar) saying that Mr. McLean wished him to convey the keg to the house of another magistrate who was to give a spree to the gentry of the neighborhood the next night, and delivered to the servant his token of his credentials—the cellar key—and with little to-do the keg was produced and slung upon his back, and in a short time he had marketed that also.

When Mr. McLean returned home he found to his bitter mortification that some distiller had wiped out one other old score against him.

As both legal and clerical authorities are now in combine against "Mountain Dew" and its makers, the life of the present-day distiller is not laid in pleasant lines.

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THE EGOTIST

By Roy Farrell Greene

I sing of the chap egotistic,
  Whose joy 'tis to lead men aside
And prate of his deeds eulogistic
  With far more than pardonable pride.
Since he's a type of no specified region,
  Where it fits best the footgear apply—
The fellow whose surname is Legion,
  Who uses no pronoun save "I."

I fancy in some future eon,
  When scientists eagerly scan
His fossil remains, they'll agree on
  The fact that a wonderful man
He was. Yet they'll sigh with distraction,
  And their theories put on the shelf,
When his humerus shows the back-action
  Caused by throwing bouquets at himself.

Conclusions they'll reach quite absurd, in
  Their efforts to label him right:
They'll say that his back bore a burden,
  Or else he was studious quite.
And Intellect's spark, they'll say, smoldered,
  While his form bent in Labor's stern rack—
Not knowing he grew so hump-shouldered
  Through patting himself on the back.