

"A CATHOLIC COUNTRY" - H.V. Morton

The charm of Ireland is partly due to the delicious slowness of life. Ireland is a Catholic country, and you feel as in most Catholic countries...that the material world is rendered unreal and rather childish because it is overshadowed by the spiritual. The Church which abhors secret societies spreads nevertheless through any Catholic country the atmosphere of a secret society; its people belong to something powerful and important which rules their conduct.

Shopkeepers do not seem to be real shopkeepers but to be pretending to be shopkeepers, just as men wheeling barrows along a road appear not to be wheeling them in order to earn money but because they gain some obscure satisfaction in the act. The religion of America, which is conquering England, has of course no foothold in Ireland. [this was written in 1930] This is the belief in the sanctity of production. It must be almost impossible for a Catholic to believe, as many an American manufacturer does, that in producing a new kind of tooth-paste or safety razor he is conferring a real benefit on the human race. This inability to believe in the spiritual glory of work gives to Ireland a gentle detachment, and necessarily reflects attention on human personalities.

In England, and in all countries where material things are important, we think of a man first as a grocer, an undertaker, a sanitary inspector, and secondarily as a fellow human being. It is almost with a shock that we realize on Sunday afternoons that policemen have plain clothes and children. In Ireland it is different. A customs officer is Mr. Casey first and a customs officer a long way after!

If an Irishman wants to accumulate real wealth he must go out of Ireland and shake himself free from an almost oriental detachment. It is this detachment from things that go-ahead nations consider vital, which explains why to some people the Irish never appear serious. Their mental attitude to life is infuriating to the materialist. He calls it laziness. But the Irish are not lazy; they are casual, indolent and metaphysical. ...

The curse of industrial nations is the cruel and cynical subjection of man to machines. Ireland may be poor, but at least her flesh and blood are not humiliated by that tyranny of mechanical things which is inseparable from the production of modern wealth.