

# The Emerald Isle

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## THE EMERALD ISLE.

The natural beauty of the variegated Irish landscape, now wild and rugged, now lush and green, or resplendent with a profusion of flowers, this no less than the singular charm of the native population never fails to impress the traveller who visits the island.

Such a traveller, Dr. Max Senger from Zürich, has recorded his impressions in a book recently published by the Büchergilde Gutenberg, Zürich. The book, a finely illustrated volume of 187 pages, is written in German and bears the title "Irland—Die Seltsame Insel".

The book was brought to our notice through the courtesy of Monsieur Walter A. de Bourg, who was Swiss Minister to Eire from 1951 to 1954 and now lives in Lausanne. M. de Bourg has contributed to it a preface which leaves us in no doubt that during his residence in Ireland he, too, became enamoured of the "Seltsame Insel". He expresses the hope that the book may arouse Swiss interest and revive and strengthen the century-old connection between the two countries.

The author, gifted with a sense of observation and a scholarly mind, shows us not only the physical and human side but also the historical background of the Irish scene. He takes us to the many notable localities in the island, beginning with Dublin, that noble city of fine buildings and wide thoroughfares of which the Irish are so justly proud, not omitting the Guinness brewery, said to be the largest in the world, and he reminds us of the stirring and so often tragic events the Irish capital has witnessed.

From Dublin the reader is conducted through the whole of the island, dotted with old churches and monasteries and with Celtic crosses. Ireland possesses an abundance of religious antiquities and a large collection of priceless treasures of Celtic art the most precious of which is the wonderful 1,000-year-old illuminated Codex known as the Book of Kells, preserved in the library of Dublin's Trinity College.

Ireland is rich in relics of this kind. Many of them belong to the "Golden Age", the times of St. Patrick who, in the year 432, introduced Christianity into the island. It must have been a peaceful conversion since no Irish martyrs are known.

The Romans never settled in Ireland but the 8th century saw the invasion by Danes and Vikings to whom is attributed the foundation of the towns of Dublin, Waterfor, Cork and Limerick.

Up to the year 1169 the Irish were not involved with England but in that year the first Anglo-Norman invasion and conquest took place. From that time onward and for the next 700 years Ireland was in a state of chronic rebellion. The frequent and sporadic risings against British rule were generally suppressed with great harshness and ruthless force. This was particularly the case at the time of Cromwell whose merciless ferocity created a feeling of hatred that never subsided. Cromwell's name is execrated by the Irish to this day.

The history of Ireland with its long tale of bloodshed and repression, the abject condition of the miserable peasantry and the recurring famines, makes painful reading. It was only in 1938 that Ireland,

under the leadership of De Valera, achieved complete independence and became, with the exclusion of six northern counties collectively known as Ulster, the Republic of Eire. The fact that these six counties do not wish to recede from Great Britain created a complex and thorny problem the issue of which is at present quite unpredictable. The author treats the subject with tact and discretion as befits a neutral observer.

Dr. Senger deals at some length with the problems of emigration, and the decrease in population partly due to a strange reluctance on the part of young Irishmen to marry. Emigration, the author writes, has become a national disease. The population of the Republic is today 2.9 million; it was double that figure a hundred years ago. Emigration, chiefly directed towards America assumed great proportions after the "hunger years" of 1845/1848. It is reckoned that the Irish colony in America amounts to 10 million.

The outstanding link between the Irish and Switzerland is, of course, St. Gallus, and takes us back to the 7th century. St. Gallus was one of twelve Irish monks led by St. Columban, who took part in that astonishing crusade through Brittany, France, Burgundy and what is now Switzerland, to convert the heathens. St. Gallus made his way as far as the district of present-day St. Gallen, preached the Gospel to the rough, wild tribes he found there, and built the Kloster in which he lies buried. He died in the year 630 at the age of 80, the Apostle of Switzerland who came all the way from far Ireland. His journey and the story of his life are recorded in a famous manuscript, the Vita Sancti Galli, written anno 800.

The foregoing is but a faint outline of Dr. Senger's book. We found it both entertaining and instructive, written in an easy, almost chatty style (which cannot always be said of German writings) and with, at times a dry humour which makes it most pleasant reading. Did he, we wonder, kiss the Blarney stone? The photographs are superb and add greatly to the reader's enjoyment.

We echo M. de Bourg's wish, expressed in his preface, for every success to this interesting work.

J.J.F.S.

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