

Book Review

Thy Tears Might Cease, by Michael Farrell
Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1964. 577 pages

AN IRISH REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

The myth of mankind's Golden Age finds a parallel in the memories of individual men. For those whose lives have been marked by some period of relative happiness and serenity, change may only signify a gradual deterioration. They may come to view the whole notion of Progress with increasing suspicion, and they would be likely to regard political changes with particular cynicism. The bargee Dan Murphy in Michael Farrell's Thy Tears Might Cease expresses such a view toward the close of that novel:

Ye'd put out one crowd to put in another, and
sure the second crowd would turn out no different
from the first.....They'd maybe improve one thing;
but, if they did, they'd worsen another and
better old thing that was there before them.

This story opens with twelve-year-old Martin Matthew Reilly whose world is that of the stable, provincial, middle-class Irish of 1910. It is a tranquil, orderly and often delightful existence marred only by some mystery concerning his parentage. By the end of the ten-year period encompassed in Farrell's lengthy novel, a great deal has changed both in Ireland and in the life of young Martin Reilly.

This was the period when John Redmond was waging his campaign in Parliament for Home Rule. His was a peaceful method but the days of peace were drawing to a close. With the outbreak of World War I plans for Home Rule were suspended indefinitely. Yet Irishmen went to fight in the English Army, confident that the war's end would see the realization of their hopes. The Easter Rising, originally supported only by a minority, brought about a complete change in atmosphere. After the executions, a reawakened Irish nationalism could no longer settle merely for Home Rule.

In the beginning of 1919, the Sinn Fein Party claimed Ireland's right to self-government with the result that there were two governments in the country. A harassing guerilla warfare broke out between the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Irish Republican Army. With the arrival of the Auxiliaries and Black and Tans on the scene, the situation became increasingly chaotic, marked by reprisals, counter-reprisals, burnings, murders and other outrages on both sides.

These are the events which form the background of Martin Reilly's progress toward manhood. The idealistic, fervently religious boy is succeeded by the unhappy adolescent whose faith has not been able to withstand the effects of personal sorrows and his experiences in a Catholic boarding school. He has his first experiences of sex and love. He interrupts his university career to take