

part in the expeditions of the Volunteers. But he is too intelligent to be taken in for long by political slogans and all the rest of the "rhetoric of freedom"; the contrast between the reality and the ideal sickens him in the end. Confronted by the disintegration of the stable world of his childhood, he mourns the destruction of the past, and Ireland no longer seems to him a place in which he can live.

Although a familiar figure in Irish literary circles, Farrell, a Dublin journalist, was unknown on this side of the Atlantic until the publication of his book here in 1964. This first and only novel has had a curious literary history. Begun in the 1930's, the book, still unfinished, ran to five volumes. By 1940, Farrell had laid the work aside and did not return to it again for fourteen years. It was accepted for publication on the condition that it be presented in a more condensed form. But Farrell seemed unable to undertake the necessary revisions, and the novel remained unpublished. The poet, Monk Gibbon, who took on the task after Farrell's death in 1962, believes it was more than the author's failing health that hindered him. Possibly the work was so much in the nature of a personal testament that he could not bear to submit it to unsympathetic criticism.

While the novel is not strictly autobiographical, it cannot be doubted that Farrell put into it a great deal of himself and his own attitudes. This is surely the case in the matter of Martin's attitude toward the Church. What Martin found unbearable in Catholicism were certain elements in the Irish variety of it -- the Puritanism, the hypocrisy, the intellectual conformity. Nevertheless, there is an indication that in a different atmosphere, under a more enlightened clergy, the hero's lost faith - never totally abandoned - could again become viable.

This account of the coming of age of a young intellectual has of course its most famous prototype in Joyce's "Portrait," although it can hardly bear comparison with the artistry and sophistication of the "Portrait." It is a large, loosely constructed, old-fashioned novel, slow-moving at first but achieving an excitement in the latter half as Ireland erupts into violence and Martin is initiated into love and warfare. The author is a competent stylist but does not always manage to infuse life into his characters. Moreover, some of the incidents seem melodramatic and contrived.

Although this novel is not one of the great ones to come out of Ireland, the work on the whole is animated by a sincerity that is, in the end, completely convincing. And the author has indicated some of the dimensions of a chronic problem of twentieth century man who is so addicted to change -- the void left by the destruction of the old ways and values. Farrell was profoundly aware that all change involves loss as well as gain and in his delineation of the pain involved in that loss he has left us a moving chronicle of the passing of a childhood and the end of an era.

Sinead Ui hAiseada