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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL VALUES  
IN IRELAND: A FIRST ASSESSMENT

Bertram Hutchinson

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL VALUES  
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Doubtless a number of "purely" economic, political and geographical factors have handicapped until comparatively recently the progress of economic development in Ireland; we scarcely need to give examples. Yet not all communities that have suffered from the same, or similar, handicaps in one historical period or another were defeated by them, economically-speaking, in just the same way as the Irish people. Clearly such differences as there were must have arisen in part from the lack of exact identity in the several sets of historical circumstances in which these communities have found themselves situated. But we may also suppose that some responsibility for differences in rates of economic development should be laid at the door of diversity of social values. That is, there may have been, features of life in Ireland (of which certain vestiges remain today) that were out of harmony with the spirit of industrial society. Irrespective possibly of oppressive historical circumstances, these may have created by themselves an obstacle to the transformation of traditional Irish life in the direction that industrial, or even agrarian, revolution demanded. The obstacles we have in mind are those that, in contrast to those imposed from without by a parsimonious Providence, for example, or an exploiting colonial power, sprang as it were from among the people themselves.

The possibility that this might be the case has been obscured in the past by the ethnocentric viewpoint of so many critics and observers of Irish life. To recognise,

other than intellectually, that other people organise their lives on the basis of values differing fundamentally from our own requires an effort of the imagination that few are willing, or perhaps able, to make. To accept also that our own standards of behaviour are not necessarily better than these, nor necessarily so attractive to others that they will wish to adopt them, calls for a further effort of the will. We are all unfortunately prone, disciplined as we are from childhood in the formulae of our own society, to imagine ourselves at a level of both moral and material development so self-evidently "normal" and attractive that others cannot fail ultimately to wish to reach it. If in former times such ethnocentrism was perhaps most noticeable in the religious field, its place has now been largely taken by the moral formulae of materialism and the society of affluence. But not all human societies share the contemporary occidental preoccupation with material well-being; nor did they in the past. A recent collection of papers<sup>1</sup> has illustrated once again the failure of western development workers in "transitional" (or under-developed) societies to understand the abyss separating their personal set of values from those of the people they wish to help - even in such basic matters (from the western viewpoint) as surplus production and conspicuous consumption. Only exceptionally, it seems, can western man accept, for example, that increased material consumption may not have to others the over-riding importance it has for him; and, ironically enough, radical political views do not guarantee the possession of this understanding. Those liberal idealists, the Shelleys, spoke for generations of disillusioned travellers

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(1) L'Economie Ostentative: Etudes sur l'économie du prestige et du don. Revue Tiers-Monde, ix, No. 33, janvier-mars, 1968.

in their distaste for peoples they failed to understand<sup>2</sup>; and Mr Podsnap "expressed the general opinion on foreign nations in the immortal words, 'They do - I am sorry to be obliged to say - as they do'. Nor was this view confined to what might be called the intellectual lower orders".<sup>3</sup>

This is a general human failure, well known to sociologists, to understand or to tolerate the way of life of a community (or of an individual) that is not one's own. Yet sociologists themselves are not blameless: too often they transfer, unmodified, concepts and categories elaborated at home to societies to which they are not, or are only marginally, applicable. This obtuseness, manifested in many contemporary plans for the economic development of pre-industrial societies, is only now beginning to give way to a more reasonable view of the task, which is as much (if it is not more) that of proselytization as it is of technical innovation. For though we must agree that the aim of every economy, however simple, is the satisfaction of needs and desires, we must assume also that these will probably differ from one society to another. Societies will not agree in detail as to the

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(2) From Milan in 1818 Shelley writes: "The men are hardly men; they look like a tribe of stupid and shrivelled slaves, and I do not think I have seen a gleam of intelligence in the countenance of man since I passed the Alps". Julian Edition of the Works of Shelley, vol. ix, p.336. Of the Germans, Mary Shelley speaks less temperately: "...the horrible and slimy faces of our companions in voyage.... Our only wish was to absolutely annihilate such uncleanly animals". Jane Clairmont, who accompanied them, sums up: "Never was a more disgraceful set than the common order of people of Germany. Your soul shrinks back to its utmost recesses when by accident you set your eyes over countenances grimed with mental and bodily depravity..." N.I. White, Shelley, vol. i, London, 1947, pp.359-360. Contemporary commentators on the Irish scene, one may suppose, felt much the same. If so, their evidence must be treated with caution. "The Victorians...were at their worst when they went abroad... It was not that the English had suddenly become stupid... but the average tourist was sealed in a disagreeable egoism that made him a very obtuse person indeed." Rebecca West, "The Englishman Abroad", in The Character of England, (ed. E. Barker,) Oxford, 1947, pp.447-498.

(3) Bertrand Russell, "Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians", in Early Victorian England, (ed. G. M. Young), London, 1934, p.19.

goods they value and wish to obtain; nor will they necessarily even opt exclusively for material goods, or put these first in their scale of values. But so wedded are we to our western assumptions that it seems incredible to us that any man, and even less credible that a whole society, can prefer a life of leisure, material squalor and dietary limitation to one of continuous work rewarded by material prosperity. There must be some mistake, the people have been deceived by a selfish and dominant elite, or they are incorrigibly lazy. We confuse a quantitative notion of a material standard of life with the qualitative idea of a way of living<sup>4</sup>, and fail to recognise that the ethos of our own society is not necessarily that of others with which we are in contact and seek to change in their own interests. This failure, reinforced by an unawareness of the essential unity of society and its organisation, sees the price of economic growth only in terms of greater conformity to the ideal type of economic man. It blinds us to the fact that for a non-western society the price is in fact that of complete transformation.<sup>5</sup>

The dilemma of western civilisation is how best to assuage its sense of guilt at the ever-widening gap between its own material prosperity and the material poverty of underdeveloped countries - whose peoples nevertheless return so dusty an answer to the demands for social transformation made of them. It is possible that the relationship between England and Ireland until Independence was one of the first instances of this dialogue de sourds that the world has witnessed; and it

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(4) Cf. Raymond Aron, 18 Lectures on Industrial Society, (tr. M. K. Bottomore), London, 1967, p.77.

(5) Ibid., pp. 55, 129. Cf. J. Poirier, "Les fonctions sociales de l'ostentation économique". Revue Tiers-Monde, ix, No. 33, 1968.

is to a preliminary examination of some of the evidence for this view that we now turn. In doing so we hope to lay a foundation for a detailed treatment of the argument that "accusations" of indolence, squalor and poverty until comparatively recently levelled at large parts of the Irish population were based upon an illegitimate and ethnocentric extension of a foreign system of values to a society differing in many fundamental respects from the society to which the critics themselves belonged. The Irish, in short, were blamed for failing to achieve materialist and rationalist goals in which they were only marginally interested, thus finding themselves in the position of an author criticised for not having produced a book he had no intention of writing.

## II

A preliminary and general reading of the accounts by foreign travellers of their visits to Ireland in the late 18th and a greater part of the 19th centuries reveals an almost unanimously critical commentary on the poor material conditions in which the mass of the Irish population were living. "Almost every reference to the subject by travellers and doctors underlines the filthiness both of the persons of the mass of the Irish and of the interior and surroundings of their cabins: all point to conditions of gross overcrowding, with whole families, or sets of families, living in one or two rooms, with sick and

healthy sleeping often under the same covering".<sup>5</sup>

Gustave de Beaumont, who travelled widely in Ireland at the beginning of the nineteenth century thought the wretched condition of the people "could scarcely be compared with that of any other country. Elsewhere the traveller might see some, even a majority of the population, destitute, but nowhere else was there to be found a whole nation of poor... In other countries only those who were unemployed or who begged were considered poor, but in Ireland farm labourers and even small farmers suffered a degree of poverty such as was almost unknown elsewhere.."<sup>7</sup>

The rural tenant usually brought his livestock inside his "cabin" at nightfall, sharing the warmth and the earthen floor with its human inhabitants: an apparently rational custom that most foreign observers found deeply shocking. There were no pigsties or cowhouses, writes Constantia Maxwell, "and no floors to the barn. Ploughs and harrows were left in the corner of the last field they had tilled, for there were no sheds to protect them... The peasant had no capital, but he was slovenly in his lack of arrangement;

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(6) K. H. Connell, The Population of Ireland, 1750-1845, Oxford, 1950, p.187. It is perhaps relevant to note that in Brazil sleeping alone, whether in sickness or in health, is thought a disturbing and disagreeable experience to be avoided if possible. Cf. Sir J. Maynard: "We must get out of our heads the notion - it is not a Russian notion, and it is not an Indian notion - that living rooms and sleeping rooms must be separate, and that each person is entitled to a room". The Russian Peasant and other Studies, London, 1942, p.343. On cleanliness in Northern Ireland, Rogan noted in 1819: "Patients were received in the fever hospitals...with their bodies 'so often bronzed with filth that the natural colour of the skin could hardly be perceived. Their hair was filled with vermin, and the smell of many was so offensive as to render it a very disgusting office...to free them from the accumulation of dirt with which they were loaded.'" K. H. Connell, loc.cit., quoting F. Rogan, Observations on the condition of the middle and lower classes in the North of Ireland, 1819, p.78.

(7) G. de Beaumont, L'Irlande sociale, politique et religieuse, Paris, 1839, quoted, N. Mansergh, The Irish Question, 1840-1921, London, 1955, p.24.

so too were the richer farmers. None of the cabins seem to have had the gardens with flowers and vegetables that graced English cottages, and as poverty can hardly have been the cause, this lack of artistry has been ascribed to concentration on the cultivation of the potato".<sup>8</sup> But, some said, rural people were often better-off than they seemed. "In 1813 I slept at a man's house who had a hundred head of black cattle and two hundred sheep, and there was not a single chair or stool in his house but one three-legged one - no bed but rushes, no vessels for boiling their meals but one, nor any for drinking milk out of but one (the Madder) which was handed round indiscriminately to all who sat down to the potato basket placed upon the pot for a table; yet this man was said to be very rich besides the stock named above."<sup>9</sup> A more recent commentator similarly concludes that the Irish may have been prone to give visitors an impression of greater poverty than their real material situation justified - partly in the hope of receiving financial aid from the visitors themselves, and partly to conceal from landlords and middlemen the true extent of their resources.<sup>10</sup>

The material conditions in which the mass of the Irish were living were thus, from the visitor's viewpoint, wretched in the extreme. It is easy for ourselves to share the same viewpoint, so general and unquestioned in the western world is the belief that material well-being

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(8) C. Maxwell, Country and Town in Ireland under the Georges, London, 1940, pp.127-128. Compare Paraná (Brazil) in the 'seventies: "Though the people had absolutely nothing to occupy them for nine months out of the twelve, yet such a thing as a 'kitchen garden' was not to be seen in the place, and as for expending even half an hour's thought or labour upon a pleasure or flower garden, such a thing the wildest imagination never dreamed of...". T.P. Bigg-Wither, Pioneering in South Brazil, London, 1878, vol. i, pp.250-251.

(9) Otway, Sketches in Erris and Tyrawly, (1812-1813) quoted Maxwell, op.cit., p.143.

(10) K. H. Connell, op.cit., pp.85-87.



overshadows all other considerations. To put the matter into some sort of perspective is therefore of importance, and it is of interest in this connection that we are given a very similar picture (by European travellers presumably not unlike to those coming to Ireland) of conditions in other countries at roughly the same period. The Italians were "... a nasty, dirty nation...Some of the filthiness of this country is such that to enter into particulars would be a loathsome task".<sup>11</sup> Slavonian villages were "nowhere remarkable for their cleanliness, but anything to approximate the filth of St. Marton I never beheld... I remember it as the most perfect sink of abominations into which my evil fortune has ever led me".<sup>12</sup> In Hesse, "the villages... display, externally at least, the utmost squalor...wooden hovels, dark, smoky, patched and ruinous."<sup>13</sup> Hungarian villages were no better: "...the open doors made a sad disclosure of filth and squalor within. The women and children, too,...were dirty and half-naked, while throughout there was an air of langour and listlessness, such as bespoke a state of social existence very little raised above barbarism."<sup>14</sup> Travellers in Argentina commented harshly on the living accommodation of farmers and gaúchos - almost totally lacking furniture, bedding a pile of sheepskins, clothing worn until it was in rags.<sup>15</sup> A German traveller in Brazil (1850) described the average house as "disorderly and dirty: spider's webs in every corner, dust, dirt and stains on the walls; on the floor the droppings of animals that enter - hens, cats, dogs and

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(11) James Cobbett, Journal of a Tour of Italy, London, 1830, p.127.

(12) Rev. G. R. Gleig, Germany, Bohemia and Hungary visited in 1837, London, 1839, vol. iii, p.147.

(13) J. Russell, A tour in Germany, etc., in the years 1820, 1821, and 1822, Edinburgh, 1825, vol. i, p.330.

(14) Gleig, op.cit., vol. iii, pp.20-21.

(15) J. Scobie, Revolution on the Pampas: A social history of Argentine wheat, 1860-1910, Austin, Texas, 1954, p.66.

even pigs...many people are in the habit of never washing..."<sup>16</sup>

A general unanimity of voice is noticeable - as in other sources that could be cited - with self-righteousness a chief ingredient; and it seems to betray (like contemporary Protestant comment on Catholic belief and liturgical practice) cultural self-centredness rather than unprejudiced observation. To deny that, according to standards perhaps external to these societies, material poverty was widespread would be manifestly absurd. Yet if we wish to determine the exact position of the Irish people in comparison with their contemporaries in other parts of the world, we discover that the comparison was rarely made. As Mansergh remarks, a propos of de Beaumont, "...it is, to say the least, doubtful whether conditions were worse in Ireland than in Central Europe, Spain or in the two Sicilies."<sup>17</sup> And however this may have been objectively, what we have now in question is the manner in which the people themselves interpreted their conditions of life. The concept of poverty is socially, not absolutely, defined; and its definition is related both to the material potentialities of the environment, and to the expectations of society's members as to what constitutes material well-being. While there can be little doubt that from western standards of today the Irish people were poor, their point of view, not being our own, may have led them to interpret their condition somewhat

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(16) E. Burmeister, Viagem ao Brasil, São Paulo, 1952, (Berlin, 1853), p.253.

(17) N. Mansergh, The Irish Question, 1840-1921, London, 1965, p.26. De Beaumont largely based his conclusions on what he saw in the west of Ireland, especially Connaught, where living conditions were worse than elsewhere. In the east of the country, on the other hand, Arthur Young thought that "...if the Irish cabbins continue like what I have hitherto seen, I shall not hesitate to pronounce their inhabitants as well off as most English cottagers." A. Young, A Tour in Ireland, 1776-1779, (ed. A.W. Hutton), London, 1892, vol. i, p.35. He modified this view later.

differently. To be sure, during the recurrent periods of food shortage to which they were subject - as in the Famine years themselves - widespread and violent feelings of discontent were to be expected. But how were such periods interpreted by the people? If these misfortunes (with the probable exception of the extreme case of the Famine) were seen in much the same light as natural calamities, as far beyond human control as drought or flood, we may suppose the standard of living traditionally postulated by the Irish was that at which they normally existed. On the other hand, the immediate effects of these calamities may have been exacerbated by a feeling that they were controllable (and hence unnecessary); by the expectation of a level of material well-being that was nevertheless not achieved even in normal times; and by resentment that the Irish people generally had little hope of attaining a level so manifestly enjoyed by a dominant minority among them. If these feelings were widespread we can assume that the low material standard of living of the Irish was not - or was no longer - being adhered to because it embodied the assumptions of tradition, but because no immediate means of improving it seemed available to them. It is part of the present argument, tentative as it is, that traditional Irish life may have been a non-materialist one that was satisfied with a decent subsistence economy because it left people free to pursue other activities they thought more important than a higher level of consumption. Yet the basis of such a way of life might well have been gradually undermined by a growing sense of relative deprivation as the greater affluence of other societies, or other groups, became more widely known. If in the meantime other preferences, such as that for leisure, did not disappear as rapidly as new material expectations developed, the resulting situation was not one in which much economic growth was likely to take place, though it may well have been one in which resentment and discontent could flourish.

Did the Irish, like a political M. Jourdain, discover something they had not known before: that they had been poor all their lives? Many nineteenth-century classical economists emphasised the need to stimulate Irish demand for consumption goods other than food. Malthus in particular argued explicitly that changes in taste and the growth of demand were essential preliminaries to industrial development in Ireland.<sup>18</sup> A recent sociological study of Dublin people suggests that, more than a century later, the search for material wealth may not yet dominate Irish life to the degree common elsewhere in the western world.<sup>19</sup>

The rise of the sense of relative poverty (and hence of a demand for more and new sorts of consumption goods) depends upon the existence, and the general recognition, of a relevant criterion of comparison. So long as such a criterion is absent or remains unrecognised relative deprivation will not be felt. Nor will it be felt while divergent standards of living are accepted as a normal and unassailable feature of life. There may be some evidence that acquiescence in the presence of a rich exploiting aristocracy may have been common enough among the Irish<sup>20</sup> -- not surprisingly in view of its long establishment in the country, during which many generations lived and died who knew of nothing else. Not that such acquiescence is central to our argument. The way of life of the rich was so different from that of the people, and

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(18) R. D. Collison Black, Economic thought and the Irish Question, 1817-1870, Cambridge, 1950, O.137.

(19) "...we cannot get concerned as (the English and the Americans) over business and material things. We are less active in these matters because always in the background of our minds we are concerned with a more fundamental philosophy." informant quoted by A. J. Humphreys, New Dubliners, London, 1956, p.219.

(2) Cf. C. Maxwell, *op.cit.*, p.20.

so apparently impossible of achievement by them that (from the point of view of providing incentives to greater productive efforts on their part) it was very largely irrelevant. And if differences in wealth were accepted as part of the natural scheme of things, cultural differences certainly were not. The religious barrier, since landlords generally were Protestants and their tenants Catholics, was an almost insuperable one that suggested almost irresistibly that material riches was the prerogative of one sect but not of the other. Indeed, such an interpretation of the situation facing the majority of the Irish people would have seemed amply confirmed by Penal Laws specifically designed to prevent the accumulation of wealth by Catholics. So that whether or not the existing structure, composed of landed aristocracy on the one hand and cottiers on the other, was accepted by both (in the sense that it seemed inevitable) it did not affect their failure in mutual understanding. "There exists (1831) to the most frightful extent a mutual and violent hatred between the Proprietors and the Peasantry", wrote the Lord-Lieutenant, Anglesey, to Lord Grey<sup>21</sup>. If these words somewhat exaggerate the reality of daily life (as, to judge from other evidence of life in Ireland during these decades, they seem to do), they suggest nevertheless that the habits and the affluence of the proprietor class could not constitute a goal towards which the mass of the people thought themselves likely to move, even had they wished to. The situation might have been different had there existed a numerous and an effective Irish middle class. Had it existed, its moderate well-being and restrained ambitions

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(21) Quoted, R. D. Collison Black, op.cit., p.9. "...the division between rich and poor in the Ireland of the Union... remained the dominant social reality. It was not only great; it was also unbridgeable". N. Mansergh, op.cit., p.23.

might have provided an incentive the people generally lacked; but it did not.<sup>22</sup> The middle class, though fairly prosperous, was too few to suggest a path to upward mobility, in either the class or the material sense, for the majority of the Irish people. Even had the middle class been more numerous than it was, its way of life, like that of the resident landowners, would not by its example have encouraged bourgeois habits of thrift, hard work and acquisition among the people. Among the gentry, says Maxwell, "...it was the rule to spend lavishly on everything that brought immediate pleasure at the cost of neglecting house and grounds, and to sacrifice the niceties of living... There was no stint of servants, horses, cars, dogs, guns, fires, meat, wine, and guests, yet English visitors noticed that rain trickled through ceilings, windows rattled, and doors hung loose on their hinges..."<sup>23</sup>. The small Irish middle class "aped the gentry,"<sup>24</sup> and patterned their lives as far as possible on the habits of their betters. It is, in short, reasonable to suppose that, even if the Irish had not been restricted economically and politically by the equivalent of a dominant colonial power, and even if the habits and values of Protestant materialism had found a place in their traditional way of life, the gap between rich and poor was too great to encourage ambitions to bridge it. The donkey of economic development moves forward only when he believes the carrot will ultimately

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(22) R.D. Collison Black, op.cit., p.135; N. Mansergh, op.cit., p.30. Compare contemporary Britain: Asa Briggs, Victorian People, London, 1965, pp.27-28. "...some of the working classes...were reaching up to grasp middle-class virtues...As the working classes were looking up, some, at least, of the upper classes were looking down. Middle-class ideals set standards for the nation...Along with the spread of middle-class values went a rise in middle-class comfort".

(23) C. Maxwell, op.cit., pp.28-29.

(24) R. D. Collison Black, loc. cit.

be his.

A popular explanation of the material poverty in which so many Irish lived lay in their supposed laziness: they were indolent, they made no effort, they neglected their land as they neglected their dwellings and their personal appearance. "The moment an overseer quits," wrote Crumpe in 1793, "they inevitably drop their work, take snuff, and fall into chat as to the news of the day; no traveller can pass them without diverting their attention from the business in hand, and giving rise to numerous surmises as to his person, errand and destination. The most trivial occurrence, especially in the sporting line, will hurry them, unless restrained, from their occupations."<sup>25</sup> Of course such comments were not directed solely at the Irish: throughout the nineteenth century (as indeed during much of the twentieth) few nations escaped a like condemnation - though Prussia was one of them.<sup>25</sup> It remained for anthropologists ultimately to point out the ethnocentrism of judgments arrived at on the basis of such pre-eminently value-loaded concepts as those of indolence and laziness. As we shall see, there were powerful external reasons that would have made hard work and high productivity unattractive even to a community that might otherwise have valued them in the same way as visiting middle class Protestants. In

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(25) S. Crumpe, An Essay on the best means of providing employment for the people, 1793, quoted C. Maxwell, *op.cit.*, p.153.

(26) See, for example, G.E. Gleig, *op.cit.*, i, pp.48-49; ii, p.168; iii, pp.20-21; J. Russell, *op.cit.*, i, pp.326-327, 330; W. Hazlitt, Notes for a journey through France and Italy, London, 1826, pp.222-223, W.M. Conway, The Alps from End to End, London, 1895, p.77; C. Seidler, Dez Anos no Brasil, 1825-1835, São Paulo, 1941, p.57; G. Gardner, Travels in the Interior of Brazil, London; 1846, pp.336-337, 379-380; J. Wells, Three Thousand Miles through Brazil, London, 1886, i, pp.253, 256-257, 338, 390, 396-397, etc; A. de Saint Hilaire, Viagem ao Rio Grande do Sul, 1820-21, São Paulo, 1939, pp.153-154; M. Leclerc, Cartas do Brasil, (1890), São Paulo, 1942, p.154; H.C. Dent, A Year in Brazil, London, 1886, p.122; L. Agassiz, A Journey in Brazil, London, 1886, pp.51-52; M. Graham, Diário de uma Viagem ao Brasil (1822), São Paulo, 1956, pp.137, 211.

fact, there was little justification for supposing the Irish, whose entire folk culture differed profoundly from that of the population of industrial Britain, shared these values at all, or felt the same ambitions. The notion of idleness, like other sins, is socially defined relative to the values of the community in question: contrary to the belief of European, particularly British, travellers of the nineteenth century and after, it has no absolute definition of universal application. So the "accusations" of laziness levelled at the Irish were in their essence no more than a tacit recognition that the Irish organised their lives in a manner unfamiliar to their observers. Work being subject to social control, like most human activities, forms an integral part (distinct from its purely economic purpose) of the functioning of the society in which it takes place. It is also foreseeably linked with its converse, leisure, and the role this plays in the successful continuance of traditional life. In the Irish case there seem to have been features of social life whose importance was only barely secondary to work and production. For these to be adequately attended to matters had to be so arranged as to provide a sufficient margin of leisure for them.<sup>27</sup> The insistent demands of industrial society had created the belief among its members that a man who was not working was doing nothing, or at any rate doing nothing of importance. But among what was probably a majority of the world's population, the matter was reversed. Work was restricted to an agreed minimum in order that the time so set free might be devoted

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(27) The function of the "margin of leisure" (and the similar accusations of laziness to which its existence gave rise) is discussed in relation to the caipira economy of the State of São Paulo (Brazil) in Antônio Cândido, Os Parceiros do Rio Bonito: estudo sobre a caipira paulista e a transformação dos seus meios de vida, Rio de Janeiro, 1964, especially pp. 53-55. Parallels with traditional Irish culture are striking, as is the fact that instability of land tenure in São Paulo led, as in Ireland, to low productivity and an absence of technical improvement in agriculture.



to other activities of equal importance. This was the pattern that Irish traditional society appears to have followed. Those other characteristics of the Irish people on which so many visitors commented - their vivacity, wit, cheerfulness, friendliness, warmth, love of conversation, of music and dancing - could only be cultivated during hours of leisure. They were as much the product of leisure time as the dourness of the Lowland Scot and the North-country Englishman is in a real sense the product of Puritanism and the mystique of hard work that grew up with the Industrial Revolution. For a variety of reasons the "gospel" of work met with a ready response in Britain, as it did in the United States. Samuel Smiles, in giving to contemporary belief a more explicit form had stated as a fact that, "As steady application to work is the healthiest training for every individual, so it is the best discipline of a state. Honourable industry travels the same road with duty; and Providence has closely linked both with happiness. The gods, says the poet, have placed labour and toil on the way leading to the Elysian Fields."<sup>28</sup> Though not recognised as such - and their recognition for what they were would have reduced their efficacy as sanctions of social behaviour - statements of this sort did no more than express, in a seemingly absolute and generally applicable form, the fundamental values of their society: they were values to which it was essential that all should adhere if this society were to maintain itself and develop along lines that seemed desirable to it. But they were clearly irrelevant to a society, such as the Irish and many others, organised on quite different assumptions. Leisure was an integral and an important part of Irish traditional culture. The use of such terms as "laziness" and "indolence" in discussing it was consequently an unjustifiable application

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(28) Quoted, Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.134.

to Ireland of concepts elaborated in a society whose circumstances and beliefs were entirely different. Yet, if leisure, and the activities that leisure made possible, were of far greater importance in other societies than they were in industrial Britain, it did not mean that productive effort was unknown among them. There were periods of hard and persistent work at times and in circumstances that were socially approved, and were economically necessary for the maintenance of a socially acceptable standard of living. The routines of Irish rural life and agricultural production were heavy while they lasted. Stones had to be cleared, lime carried and spread, seaweed collected (Arthur Young himself comments upon the great and persistent efforts made in the use of seaweed as a fertiliser),<sup>29</sup> turf cut and carted, potatoes planted and raised. The Irish, like other communities, worked hard when they considered the circumstances justified it<sup>30</sup>; and their critics were often reminded that much of the hardest and heaviest work of Britain itself was carried out by Irish immigrants.

Nevertheless, while in explaining the protracted failure of Irish economic development due weight must be given to traditional modes of social organisation, there were other and more external influences tending to reinforce them and to ensure their survival beyond their natural term. Had circumstances been different Irish

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(29) Cf. C. Maxwell, *op.cit.*, p.154.

(30) It is curious that so few European critics of other societies who made accusations of laziness and indolence were unable to take the single further step of recognising the social definition of work and the circumstances justifying it. Many of these writers mentioned local feats of physical effort accomplished when necessary. Cf., for Latin America, J.B. von Spix and C.F. Martius, *Viagem pelo Brasil, 1817-1820*, São Paulo, 1938, i, p.72; J. Scobie, *op.cit.*, p.14; C. Seidler, *op.cit.*, p.87; J. Wells, *op.cit.*, i, pp.103, 142, 143, 279, 296, 337. Similar evidence on this, as on earlier points, is available for traditional societies in Africa and the Far East.

traditional culture would doubtless have undergone an earlier change in the direction already taken by the population of the rest of the British Isles, with the probable exception of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. The fact that social change was so long postponed emerged from historical events that had with the utmost rigidity confined the Irish people within a tradition that was inappropriate to economic growth. We have already seen that the landowning and the exiguous middle classes provided little incentive, through their example, to increased effort towards material betterment because the gap separating them from the rest of the Irish population appeared unbridgeable. But a yet more serious obstacle to economic growth was that presented by the terms on which (with the exception of Ulster and one or two districts in the south, such as the baronies of Bargy and Forth in County Wexford,) land was occupied throughout Ireland. "Almost alone amongst mankind, the cottier is in this condition", wrote John Stuart Mill, "that he can scarcely be either better or worse off by any act of his own. If he were industrious or prudent, nobody but his landlord would gain; if he is lazy and intemperate, it is at his landlord's expense. A situation more devoid of motives to either labour or self-command, imagination itself cannot conceive. The inducements of free beings are taken away, and those of a slave not substituted. He has nothing to hope, and nothing to fear, except being dispossessed of his holding..."<sup>31</sup> The system, indeed, appears to have been designed by landlords who were at once notably mercenary and unusually irrational: for although their preoccupation was to obtain from their land the maximum financial return, their pursuit of this goal was not an economically rational one. From today's viewpoint it is

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(31) J. S. Mill, Chapters and Speeches on the Irish Land Question, London, 1870, pp.77-78, quoted, N. Mansergh, *op.cit.*, p.35.

impossible not to conclude that the landlord's profits could not have been maximised by a system that disallowed compensation for permanent improvements, that absorbed through immediately increased rent any rise in farm output that an ambitious tenant might achieve, and through this constant search for higher rents not only denied security of tenure to existing occupants, but handicapped the new by obliging them to contract for payments they knew themselves unable to meet. The economic irrationality of such a system, as equally evident to many contemporary observers as to ourselves, is so curious that it suggests that its origin must be sought in a sociological rather than a purely economic source. We may be mistaken in seeing the landowner and his agents as hard-hearted men concerned, to the exclusion of all else, with wringing the last halfpenny of profit from their tenants. In fact, they were concerned with something else as well: the maintenance of the political, social and religious status quo. In other words, profits were to be maximised only to the degree possible within an existing framework. Of the three features of the status quo we have mentioned, religious stability appears to have occupied the central position in the minds of the Protestant Ascendancy. Penal Laws forbidding land ownership and the accumulation of wealth, indeed generally discouraging economic activity among Catholics, had a dual purpose. They were to reinforce the position in Ireland of the Protestant faith (and of its adherents), while at the same time providing a well-merited punishment of the defeated majority for holding religious views that were not those of their conquerors. The landlord appears to have been not merely indifferent to the welfare of his tenants: he seems also to have felt that such misfortunes as came their way were in some degree the just deserts of a vanquished, lazy, unreliable and religiously misshapen population. Of course it would be unusual to find an elite indulging

such schadenfreud to their own overall detriment; and it appears likely that in Ireland the landlords felt that what they lost monetarily through discouraging prosperity among their tenants they gained through the simultaneous reinforcement of their political and economic power. The implication of the position in which they found themselves was such that, if the return from their rents was low compared with the economic potential of their land they could not afford to take steps to increase it if this meant -- or if they imagined it meant -- that their dominance would be undermined as a consequence. If therefore indifference and neglect was widespread among the landowning class, it seems to have been accompanied by an antagonism whose existence was felt by the mass of the Irish people, who largely reciprocated it; and who responded to the situation in appropriate psychological and sociological form -- withdrawal from contact, occasional outbreaks of aggression, restriction of ambition and a turning away from economic goals whose attainment was forbidden, towards the pursuit of other aspects of their traditional life that they were free to develop because they did not conflict with the interests of the dominant elite. The situation created by the Ascendancy, in short, reinforced tendencies already present in Irish traditional life, for in so far as material affluence was secondary to the Irish community in comparison with less tangible goals, the system elaborated by the landlords and their agents did much to ensure that this preference survived. By the time when, during the nineteenth century, the possibilities of the economic development of the country began to be taken seriously, the habits of generations were so rooted that it took another two generations to eradicate them; and perhaps even today they have not been eradicated from all parts of Ireland.

The division of Irish society into two parts is of course not unusual, historically speaking. It is the persistent mutual exclusiveness of the parts that is somewhat less common, however, when not distinguished by the obvious physical stigmata of ethnic differences. A severe dichotomy established by conquest is not uncommonly healed through the instrumentality of a system of socio-economic relationships originally coming into being to make cooperation possible. Such a system has been frequently that of feudalism, or quasi-feudalism, or some set of relationships between landowner and tenant having quasi-feudal characteristics. In the Irish context such a system, had it existed, would have had its relevance, not least for the security of tenure that it would have provided. On the other hand - and probably most significantly for our present argument - the prevalence of a dependent and derivative land tenure is not the most distinctive element of feudal society, which was, rather, a close and in a sense intimate social relationship between the lord and his vassal<sup>32</sup>. "The baron knew his vassals personally. He thought and felt as they did. He had the same superstitions, the same habits, the same language. He was their master, harsh sometimes and arbitrary. For all of that, he was a man they understood perfectly, in whose conversation they could share, at whose table, be it in a humbler station, they often sat, and with whom they sometimes got drunk...this real familiarity, based on an identical education, or lack of education if one prefer, enables an inferior to endure and forgive... In the Middle Ages the first peasant revolts broke out not when feudalism was harshest, but when the nobles had learned to associate

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(32) Cf. Pollock and Maitland, History of English Law, Cambridge, 1923, i, pp.66-67; H. Pirenne, Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe, London, 1952, pp.8-9.

with one another...peasantry and nobility became two peoples apart..."<sup>33</sup> A socially unifying relationship of this sort was conspicuously absent in Ireland, although in many respects the situation was one from which a feudal type of organisation might have been expected to emerge - not, of course, in a "pure" ninth century European form, but at any rate in one which would have emphasised a degree of reciprocity in landlord-tenant obligations. Frederic Seebohm believed, indeed, that it had been the intention under the Irish settlements in the seventeenth century to establish feudal tenures similar to those on English manors: "...the great wrong done to the Irish peasantry, and therefore to the Irish nation, did not so much consist in the abolition of the old Irish tenures and the introduction of English ones in their place, as the neglect or refusal on the part of England and Anglo-Irish law to recognise the just rights of the Irish under those very feudal tenures which England herself forced upon them."<sup>34</sup> So that although many of the circumstances, such as a dominantly rural and closed economy, the absence of significant urban markets, great estates, dependent tenantry, and a large degree of local autonomy, were those appropriate to a quasi-feudal system, this failed to materialise, and Ireland was left exposed to an unequal duality whose impact was greatest upon the Catholic majority. No new form of social organisation was superimposed upon their traditional one; yet the latter had been made inappropriate. Few technical innovations were introduced to agriculture, or new forms of artisanry

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(33) G. Mosca, *The Ruling Class*, (tr. H.D. Kahn), New York, 1939, pp.112-113.

(34) F. Seebohm, "The land question: Part I, English Tenures in Ireland", *Fortnightly Review*, N.S., vol. vi, 1839, p.327, quoted R. D. Collison Black, *op.cit.*, p.56.

proposed by paternal landlords; yet both these seem to have been necessary if landlords were to obtain increased returns from their estates, and if tenants were to have the means to meet increasing demands. No patron-client relationship grew up that provided the political and economic security that traditional society was decreasingly able to offer as a rapidly growing population, coupled with land shortage, steadily undermined it. Yet at the same time, independence and economic individualism, even had these occupied a central place on the stage of traditional Irish life (where in fact family loyalty and mutual aid figured far more), were discouraged by punitive sanctions designed, specifically it seems, to prevent their emergence. On the side of the elite the duality of Irish society was accentuated by the fact that a large proportion of landowners lived abroad during most of the year; while their agents, middlemen, rent-collectors, solicitors and the like, felt that their claims to higher social status largely depended upon the degree to which they demonstrated their separation from the Irish community they lived in, and their identity with the absentee landlords they served. The situation emerging from the interplay of these various factors was thus not one in which economic development was likely to flourish, even had either side of the duality been intent on its cultivation. Many nineteenth century commentators were at pains to emphasise the exceptions to this general picture of economic stagnation. There was the growth of some forms of industry in the north-east of Ireland, where the prosperity of the peasantry was also somewhat greater than elsewhere. Rural prosperity was also greater by contrast among the population of the southern baronies mentioned earlier. As far as Ulster was concerned, a popular explanation was found in the fact that the majority of the population of this region was Presbyterian, not Catholic - yet Catholics also



shared Ulster's prosperity. Moreover, the same argument had no relevance to the baronies, whose population was dominantly Catholic. Without denying the possibility that some aspects of Catholic philosophy are inimical to economic growth in certain circumstances, it nevertheless appears fairly certain that the only features these various communities shared were, first, that they enjoyed greater security of land tenure, and second, that a large part of their social traditions stemmed from sources outside Ireland. Our next task, therefore, is to discover if there were features of Irish traditional and customary life that themselves placed a barrier on the road to economic development.

### III

From the limited evidence provided by preliminary study we cannot hope to provide more than a tentative answer to such a question. Nevertheless, there are clear indications of the form some of these social obstacles may have taken: and many of them are on the whole not dissimilar to those observed to have influenced the course of events in other under-developed economies. What seems to have been largely absent, however, is that patron and client relationship which, although serving other social and economic purposes, can be shown to have played so central a part in handicapping the economic development of other societies.<sup>35</sup> As we shall see, there were certain aspects

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(35) We have discussed some aspects of this matter as it relates to Brazilian society in, B. Hutchinson, "The Patron-Dependent relationship in Brazil," Sociologia Ruralis, vol. vi, No. 1, 1966, pp.3-30.

of Irish traditional social organisation that manifested some features of this relationship. Yet it was not the chief characteristic of Irish society - largely, no doubt, because Irish landowners were reluctant to accept the responsibilities of the patron's role that would otherwise have been thrust upon them. Since most of the normal patron figures were absent, neither economic nor social security could be obtained by the people through their intervention and protection. Doubtless the parish priest occupied a sort of protective or patron's role in relation to his flock; but as he had few, if any, material resources, or means to obtain them, his interventions on his parishioners' behalf were either religious, in the spiritual world, or moral, in the defence of their interests on the local, and sometimes national, political level. He was in no position to come directly to the material aid of his parishioners, as a patron in a quasi-feudal society was able, as he was in duty bound, to assist his dependants. Irish society had to rely largely upon its own resources.<sup>36</sup> Security against ill-fortune was consequently sought in ways familiar to us from many other peasant, or folk, societies, chief among them a variety of forms of mutual aid. On the largest scale mutual aid might recruit almost the entire adult population in the community to ensure its functioning; but this was comparatively rare. A system of cooperative farming "resembling that of the English manor", and known as "rundale" or "runrig" (said to be a relic of the Gaelic land tenure system) was dying out or had disappeared entirely

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(36) There were however exceptional landlords, among them some mentioned by Arthur Young, who felt responsibility for their tenant's well-being, and accordingly came to their aid. The Edgeworths of Co. Longford are a familiar example.

by the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>37</sup> But there were other forms of cooperation in the community. "A farmer who was desirous of having his turf or hay cut", says Maxwell,<sup>38</sup> "would have an announcement to that effect made at the parish chapel on Sunday, and then, on the appointed morning, all his neighbours and friends, some of whom had perhaps to travel ten or twelve miles, would assemble for the purpose of assisting in the labour, which they would rapidly complete in some four or five hours. No wages would be offered on these occasions - indeed they were not expected - but the farmer provided a feast at the end of the day, with dancing and a piper".

It is not altogether clear, however, that this description, or the source whence it was obtained, is sufficiently subtle. While it is true that many peasant societies, pioneering communities and the like, developed community systems of cooperation similar to this, in which membership of the community was alone a sufficient qualification for the duty of mutual aid to be felt,<sup>39</sup> there have been many more that have restricted the obligations of reciprocal aid to kinsmen as these were locally defined. Other evidence relating to Irish traditional society suggests strongly that a similar restriction operated within

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(37) Cf. Maxwell, *op.cit.*, pp.120-121.

(38) *Loc.cit.*, citing T. Crofton Croker, Researches in the South of Ireland.

(39) Possible references to the literature are of course very numerous. Examples are, for the USA, W. Gee, The Social Economics of Agriculture, New York, 1954; for Portugal, Vilarinho da Furna, uma aldeia comunitária, Porto, 1948; for Brazil, C. Caldeira, Mutirão: formas de ajuda mútua no meio rural, São Paulo, 1956. R. Redfield seems to have observed the same institution in Mexico: Tepoztlán - a Mexican Village, Chicago, 1930, pp.126-127; but O. Lewis, Life in a Mexican Village, Urbana, 1963, p.142, reports its disappearance by the time of his subsequent visit.

it. Indeed, the critical importance of the family as the basic unit of social organisation, and of mutual aid, is specifically emphasised by Arensberg, who writes, "Thus cooperation is woven deeply into the countryman's habit and sentiment. Questioning in the life of the present soon brought out the base upon which it rests. In every case an extended family relationship was involved. The countryman is a family man in this cooperation with his fellows, as well as in his work at home... No man had mowed for all his relations, that was not necessary. One man had mowed, not for a relative, but for a boon companion. Furthermore, the bachelors, whom no one had helped, had been able to help no one. The two 'strangers', who had moved into the townland, in one case fifty years before, in the other thirty, had no relatives 'on this side'... They call it "cooring" in the brogue. The word is the Irish comhair, meaning aid, partnership and alliance..."<sup>40</sup> It is sufficient for our present purpose that mutual aid and cooperation, whatever the basis on which it was organised, once played (and in some parts of Ireland may still play) a central role in the economic life of the community. For although mutual aid, as its purpose was, gave a security to the people that was not forthcoming from an individual patron, or from the state, or from the natural conditions of climate and soil in which they lived,<sup>41</sup> it may be

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(40) C. M. Arensberg, The Irish Countryman, New York, 1937, p.56.

(41) "The climates of Ireland are more favourable to grassland than to arable farming, and crops are won with a hard struggle in many years: it is perhaps not remarkable that the Irish speak of 'saving the harvest'." T. W. Freeman, Ireland: a general and regional geography, London, third edition, 1965, p.52.

plausibly assumed that such a system severely handicapped economic development,<sup>42</sup> for it was by its nature essentially static. Work that was to be shared had to be work whose procedures were familiar to all those collaborating in it. This meant that traditional methods, quite apart from the influence of normal human inertia, were preferable.<sup>43</sup> Neither the elaboration of technical improvement, nor its adoption if suggested, would have been important features of an economic life whose acceptance of innovation must have been slow and unpredictable. Nor would a system of mutual aid provide a setting in which diversity of individual wealth could have been easily tolerated except within fairly narrow limits. A peasant society that demands of its members adherence to a number of socially-determined norms rarely extends a welcome to one of its members seeking to separate himself from them. The economic life of such a community, susceptible as it is to the concept of what is normal or average, discourages the man who, even by his own efforts, achieves an economic surplus beyond what is usual; and if he does so, he exposes himself to the jealousy of his fellows, even to that of the supernatural. It is therefore the more unlikely that, when an abnormally generous surplus depended upon its existence, or part of its existence, upon community cooperation, its attainment would

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(42) We are assuming that economic development would have taken an individualist, capitalist form. Presumably a tradition of community cooperation might have favoured economic development along socialist or communist lines. That this did not happen is a separate problem we do not intend to pursue here, although it is perhaps worth noting that if labour was at times traditionally cooperative, its product was individually owned.

(43) In the old men's house, where the older men of the village met regularly for discussion, "...the countryman's way of life exerts its strongest sway upon him. It is the 'parliament' of his fellows. The topics brought up and debated upon are much the same from year to year and from place to place. Agriculture, perhaps, comes first. Times of sowing, reaping and harvesting are debated. Prices are compared, innovations tested. Traditional methods receive their strongest support here, in the web of legend, proverb and reference to the past the speakers throw about them." C. M. Arensberg, op.cit., p.132.

be either sought by the individual or tolerated by the community were it to occur. "The ideal is rather a relatively comfortable mediocrity - above all morally comfortable. The optimum rather than the maximum is sought... The ideal is that each member of the group remain in his place."<sup>44</sup> Nor can the countryman, short of moving away to the city, avoid his community's demand for economic conformity by a transfer of his allegiance to a neighbouring village, for a variety of reasons. The Irishman of tradition, perhaps many Irishmen of today, feel a bond of loyalty to their natal community they do not find easy to break. "A particular ancestral line is inseparable," says Arensberg,<sup>45</sup> "from a particular plot of earth". The counterpart of this feeling is manifest in the refusal of a traditional community to accept fully in its membership a renegade from another quarter, for however much his physical presence may be tolerated, he remains a non-member who plays little, if any, part in mutual aid or in other forms of reciprocal rights and obligations. "Irish familism is of the soil. It operates most strongly within allegiance to a definite small area. Life moves within this area for the countryman; he rarely goes beyond it except on periodic visits to his market town. He counts his fellows from within these same narrow bounds. Beyond the next stream, over the next hill, down the valley, a similar allegiance begins and ends. Across the line are people no different from himself; but they are 'strangers', 'from beyond', or 'from the other side'".<sup>46</sup> How far these

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(44) Jean Poirier, op.cit., p.12 (our translation).

(45) Op.cit., p.83.

(46) Ibid., pp.107-108.

feelings went further, to produce distrust and suspicion, is difficult to estimate from the evidence so far available to us. Had this happened, as would have been by no means unusual in a peasant community<sup>47</sup>, it would have redoubled the handicap facing economic growth, especially in . . . entrepreneurial and commercial endeavours depending for their success upon relationships which, if impersonal, nevertheless presuppose a degree of mutual trust.

Cooperation in Irish traditional life, therefore, while it played its part in ensuring a greater economic security for the community than it could otherwise have expected, had its negative aspect, in that it discouraged technical innovation, and made individual economic advancement contingent upon emigration, either to the city or abroad. An implicit social understanding of these circumstances may well have been one source of the Irish lack of material ambition on which we commented earlier. The absence of material ambition in itself, whatever its source, would have made static economic conditions acceptable to the community. But the straitjacket (albeit, perhaps, unfelt except by the social deviant) imposed by the community system of mutual aid had a second and probably more important restrictive layer composed of a series of beliefs and expectations as to individual behaviour that was connected with the family and its central position in Irish social organisation. "To be at home with the Irish countryman as his friend for any considerable length

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(47) Compare rural Greece, for example. "The critical unit of social organisation in the community is the family, whether in its elementary or extended form. . . Indeed, between men who are unrelated by kinship or marriage there is deep distrust which in practice prevents any effective form of cooperation." J. K. Campbell, "Honour and the Devil", in Honour and Shame: the values of Mediterranean Society, (ed. J. G. Peristiany), London, 1935, p.142.

of time is to come to know virtually every family in the rural community. This is due to the essential structure of that community and an enlightening clue to its nature. For in rural Ireland the farm family is typically small, yet in nearly every rural community the small farm family is the centre of power. Indeed, a rural community for the most part is a group of interlocking small farm families tied together by bonds of kinship and neighbourliness, and these mainly mould the structure of the place."<sup>48</sup>

In so moulding the structure, the farm family also moulded the personality of its members, and laid down the limits within which individual behaviour was permitted to vary. From this source also, therefore, ideas of economic or technical innovation - even had ideas of this sort occurred to individuals whose lives were passed in close adherence to tradition - found obstacles to their realisation: this time from within the family where they were first conceived. While, as we shall see, the strong Irish sense of family and kinship solidarity had other advantages for the individual member of it, its obverse was an insistence upon conformity. To a great extent it was through patterns of deference, to age, to the father, to the mother, and to other senior kin,<sup>49</sup> that conformity was

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(48) C. M. Arensberg, *op.cit.*, p.11.

(49) "The old fellows, the men of full status who head farms and farm-working corporations of sons - those who have turned or are about to turn over their control to a younger generation - are accorded a very real precedence. In their own houses we have seen it to be very great; in the community at large it is little less so. A visiting farmer...takes his place at the hearth seat, his sons lag behind...in the wakehouse... the places by the fire go to old adult 'men' and 'women'; the 'boys' and 'girls' must group themselves behind... On the road to shop, church or fair, the young man must keep pace, and the elder may call him to his side... In... discussion it is the elder men who may regulate length and subject of conversation.

Then, secondly, there is the matter of the contacts with the outside world. The elder men...represent the interests of the community before priest, schoolmaster, merchant, cattleman and government official..." *Ibid.*, pp.121-123.



secured. Indeed age dominance was such that the achievement of adult status was decided, not by some objective criterion of chronological age, but at the moment the father chose (or by reason of his death was obliged) to give up control of the farm, or other property, to that of his son. Until this happened, often in extreme old age, his sons remained "boys", their standing low, and their independence minimal, even into middle age and beyond. Moreover, their dependence was secured by the absence of a foreseeable order of succession. There was no law, no convention, of primogeniture: the father was free to pass the control of his property to any one of his sons; and in order to retain his influence for as long as possible he would conceal the identity of the son on whom his choice had fallen.<sup>50</sup> The child therefore, even the sociological child of advanced years, was taught (and in some areas may still be taught) social values, socially accepted forms of behaviour, approved technical methods, that did not, in Arensberg's words, "deviate from the right and traditional pattern, which folklore, adage and the censure of the village support".<sup>51</sup> The combination, therefore, of general community conformity, the dominance of tradition, the lack of a powerful drive towards material goals if these lay outside what tradition had established as acceptable - this combination was mediated through a stern father figure whose purpose was to retain the sons in a status of perpetual boyhood. By its definition such a

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(50) "...primogeniture has been credited with facilitating industrial development in Japan. Younger sons were both economically and emotionally drawn to the new urban occupations. These younger sons...appear to have been especially responsive and adaptive to the introduction of new styles of life". J. C. Abegglen, "The relationship between economic and social programming in Latin America," in Social Aspects of Economic Development in Latin America, (eds. E. De Vries and J. M. Echaverria) Paris, 1963, p.262.

(51) Arensberg, op.cit., p.55.

status position is not one whence economic or technical innovations are expected, or are accepted if they arise, If we assume that economic development depends significantly upon a population that values and encourages new ideas, energetic entrepreneurial activity and economic individualism (although there are of course many other relevant factors), traditional Ireland did not provide it. On the contrary, such manifestations seem to have been discouraged; and the situation may not yet have entirely changed. "In our family" said a Dublin woman quoted in a recent sociological study,<sup>52</sup> "if you started to express any ideas of your own, or take on any projects, my father would put a stop to it. He would tell you not to be ridiculous, and he would put you in your place." I am not sure it wasn't a good thing. Perhaps we would have made ourselves ridiculous...but sometimes I think we Irish carry it a little far." It will be noted that the crucial matter, for this informant, was the fear of ridicule - that is, of community censure of unconventional behaviour. Yet the statement of another informant in the same inquiry seems to confirm paternal preoccupation with the preservation of his personal status. "The fathers have an attitude that the sons are always boys who can't do anything right. I know my boys felt that their father thought they were incapable of doing anything on their own. And so they would not do a thing round the house if their father was at home...But if Frank wasn't home, they would go ahead and do a job...That is very common... The fathers think the boys are children even when they are eighteen or nineteen and they tend to keep them children. They won't let them go off on their own or have a bit of their own head and perhaps make some mistakes, but learn by the mistakes. And I don't think that is very much different than it was in my parents' day."<sup>53</sup>

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(52) A. J. Humphreys, *op.cit.*, p.146.

(53) *Ibid.*, p.160.

Both these statements support the view of Irish society as traditionally one in which the young, the energetic, the innovating, were steered as far as possible towards conformity with established patterns of behaviour. To the degree that this control was successfully imposed, individual ambition was thwarted. Moreover, although in other western societies the influence of the jealous father in restricting his son has been counterbalanced by a contrary influence emanating from the mother, in Ireland this does not seem to have occurred. If the mother's influence upon her sons has been traditionally powerful throughout Ireland, it operated nevertheless in a direction opposed to that of economic development, since it set limits to her sons' freedom which, while they were different in their nature from those imposed by the father, were none the less difficult for them to circumvent. The ties binding them to their mother were emotional ones whose general tendency seems to have been to secure to a large degree their dependence on her. It is true that the father's interest was to subordinate his sons to himself for as long as possible, but he did this in a manner that revealed little of his real affection for them. The Irish mother went to the other extreme, creating an atmosphere of warm sentiment between herself and her sons which may well have produced, instead of the state of emotional equilibrium suggested by Arensberg,<sup>54</sup> an emotional imbalance that prevented the emergence of that masculine aggressive independence on which so much economic innovation and entrepreneurial activity has its base. This maternal cushioning of the male's hard lot, this mollification of the irritations attendant upon constant subordination to the father's wishes served to

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(54) Ibid., p.59.

compensate (in Humphrey's view<sup>55</sup>) for the long postponement of adulthood for the son. On the other hand, the mother's reluctance to relinquish the control such a relationship gave her over her sons' behaviour reduced still further the latter's freedom; and indeed may well have minimised his desire for it. The mother's opposition certainly appears to have been an important consideration discouraging her sons' marriage; and this in its turn may have contributed something to the obstacles already facing Irish economic growth. "Where the proportion of people unmarried is high", remarked the Commission on Emigration, with some insight, "there is a risk that the community's sense of responsibility, or that its realisation of the value and importance of the basic unit of society - the family - will be inadequate and that, as a result, its attitude to life may be unprogressive. This may be aggravated by the lesser need for the qualities of hard work and enterprise. Unmarried people are, of course, often active and even leaders in many spheres, but married people generally take a keener interest in the more serious social and economic matters affecting the general well-being."<sup>56</sup> There are of course many other factors besides that of the mother's disapproval that have led to a persistently low marriage rate; and it is interesting to speculate as to the relationship this may have borne

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(55) *Op.cit.*, p.20. "...especially in late adolescence and early manhood the mother 'slaves for the boys' and, what is more, makes the girls do likewise. She not only lessens the sons' range of domestic responsibility, but conceives that it is part of her and her daughters' job to provide the sons with special service and comforts. This is so established that the daughters are resigned to it." *Ibid.*, p.162. See also p.163 for a lengthy verbatim citation from one of Humphrey's informants illustrating the same point.

(56) Report of the Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems, 1948-1954, Dublin, 1955, para. 159.

to slow economic development in Ireland. Lack of economic growth, however, as the same Report points out at some length, was itself one of the chief causes of low Irish nuptiality.

But if the family and its influence restricted individual freedom and thereby discouraged economic enterprise, the advantages of the system were equally great. The individual member of the community needed the family for his own defence against outsiders, to produce what he needed for his sustenance, and to attain some degree of prosperity. A family composed of blood kinsmen and affinal relations formed in its local context a powerful system for the maintenance of an agreed standard of living, and of prestige or status in the community - a system that was reinforced by its extension to include relationships with other more distant kin. Irish society, like feudal society,<sup>57</sup> did not understand purely economic relationships, nor the impersonal and merely contractual associations that characterise industrial society. In concrete terms, a son could expect his family to support him; to intervene on his behalf, and to obtain economic and other opportunities for him. Moreover, not only would he expect this: the community might well regard with suspicion an individual enterprise that failed to enjoy such family support. According to Humphreys<sup>58</sup> the expectation persists to the present day, and fathers in particular feel an obligation to find employment for their children. Indeed, the same writer reports, some Dublin companies have the formal policy of giving preference, in making new appointments, to the sons of their employees.

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(57) Marc Bloch, "The rise of dependent cultivation and seignorial institutions," Cambridge Economic History of Europe, (eds. J. H. Clapman and E. Power), Cambridge, 1942, vol. i, p.257.

(58) Op.cit., pp.151, 181-182.

A male informant told Humphreys, "...you certainly would bank on your relatives for help in getting jobs, particularly for the children. Relatives help each other in that way all the time."<sup>59</sup>; and a failure of relations to adhere to this system (for example, by refusing to help, or giving preference to a non-relative) would be the occasion for a family feud. With the increasing rationalisation of economic life in Ireland, the intrusion of personal relationships in such matters is no doubt diminishing - at the verbal level particularly the system is now widely criticised and rejected - yet its influence remains today as a reminder of the power it exerted in the past. It was not exerted in the direction of economic efficiency, in the sense we understand that notion today, for its purpose was the different one of providing a form of security for the community, whose individual members were unable (or were prevented by convention) from seeking their own means of survival.

It had its extension to the commercial field. Family businesses had mainly family interests at heart, and tended to employ family members in them if they were available. This meant that no unrelated employee, even one of long standing, could feel secure that his post would not be given at short notice to some relation of the owner who required it; and, lacking this security, he was not likely to exert himself beyond the immediate call of his duty. But if the dominance of personal considerations over those of practical efficiency had in this way as in others a far-reaching negative influence upon economic enterprise, it provided compensation in the immediate uncertainties of life - and it was of course with these that the Irishman was almost exclusively concerned. The system itself held its advantages for commerce, especially at the level of the small shopkeeper

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(59) Ibid., p.109.

who until comparatively recently dominated the Irish economic scene, at any rate numerically. Just as farming was to an important degree dependent upon mutual aid and family loyalty for its prosperity, so the shopkeeper relied upon similar feelings for his own. Once again the advantages were reciprocal. Arensberg comments: "...the country customer who brings his trade into the shop does so in response to the ties of kinship and friendliness. He 'goes with' a shopkeeper or publican, most often, as he "coors" with his country friends. This is not his only incentive, but it is his principal one. The social order of which he is a part embraces the town-dwelling shopkeeper; trade follows friendship. Many indeed are the shops which rely almost entirely upon this 'family trade'...The shopkeeper is bound in his turn to his 'family trade'. He owes obligation to the 'country cousins' who buy from him."<sup>60</sup> Nor does this relationship appear to be one exclusive to the rural areas of the past: Humphreys reports a similar situation obtaining in modern Dublin.<sup>61</sup> It will be noticed that the intrusion of considerations of friendship and loyalty into economic transactions retains these at the personal instead of at the impersonal, contractual level that are usual - and are generally thought economically desirable - in a modern rationalised industrial society. It is therefore no exaggeration to see in the persistence of these relationships a not inconsiderable obstacle to the sort of economic development that has occurred elsewhere in the West. The fact that they have proved resistant to change suggests that they play a central role in Irish social organisation, a role which perhaps ensures the preservation of the existing class, or more probably status, structure of the community.

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(60) Ibid., pp.154-155.

(61) Op.cit., p.98.

IV

On the one hand, then, there were obstacles to economic development in Ireland that arose from forces which, operating from outside the traditional Irish social order, had their source in the circumstances of conquest. On the other hand, as we have just seen, there existed an entirely different set of forces, tending towards the same end, whose origin was within traditional Irish society itself. The combination of the two was doubtless sufficiently powerful to create a situation in which economic enterprise was not likely to have found it easy to operate, even had the purely economic aspects of it been suitable, as they were not. Yet while it is possible to disentangle the main threads in the fabric of Irish socio-economic life as it existed up to the fairly recent past, the mode of their interrelation is not so clear. To what extent, for example, were the internal social obstacles to economic innovation and growth a community response to external handicaps imposed on the Irish population? Was perhaps even the non-materialist character of so much of Irish life a reaction to, or a compensation for circumstances that made material acquisition or the enjoyment of consumption for its own sake impossible of achievement? In other words, would Ireland perhaps have followed lines of economic development not dissimilar to those followed by other western European countries had external factors not restrained it? Had the non-materialist philosophy (assuming that later investigation shows this to have been as dominant as we have supposed) an autonomous status, as it were; or were the Irish merely making a virtue of a necessity? What are we to make of the occasional brief references in the literature to "the peasant's shrewed eye to his own interests"? Could this mean that material acquisitiveness was in fact



tolerated - but only within a framework, and according to standards laid down in advance by the community?

There seems little doubt that Irish traditional life was marked by an insistence upon social conformity that is not unusual in a peasant society. What was perhaps somewhat less usual was the emphasis that was placed - and in much of rural, if not urban Ireland is still placed - upon economic conformity. The admired man was not he who by his own efforts emerged above the ruck of his fellows, but he who conformed to within the fairly narrow limits laid down by the community for the material prosperity of its members. We have seen something of the reasons for this in the system of reciprocal aid, the strong family loyalty, the aftermath of the Penal Laws. All these influences put a premium upon traditionalism as against innovation, whether technical or economic; and had their consequence in economic stagnation. In combination with other factors, particularly perhaps that of filial subordination to the parents, and even the unquestioning obedience the Catholic Church in Ireland demanded of its flock, the extension of conformity was such that the entire ethos of the society has been dominated by it. One of the most obvious, and one of the most far-reaching, consequences of this has been the persistent emigrating stream of Irish people whose enterprise and innovating potentialities could only find free expression outside their native country: for although the causes of Irish emigration are complex, there is little doubt that the stifling effect of social and economic conformity has meant that Ireland has actually offered no defined role for the enterprising. Too often for economic health the "successful" man who operates within the Irish framework is unwelcome, a renegade almost from the standards of conformity according to which the

community generally conducts its life. These characteristics have their roots in tradition and in historical experience: yet their continued existence depends upon their possessing a functional raison d'etre in contemporary social organisation in Ireland. Is their persistence justified, sociologically speaking? Or have the reasons that gave birth to them ceased to have meaning: in which case may we expect the gradual emergence of a new set of values more appropriate to the course of economic development on which Ireland is now set?