

# Into Egypt

Des Flynn

OH DEAR, Oh dear, it is bad. I'm talking about the television. But I'm glad about that in a way. You see the combined output of eight stations is so fearfully unentertaining, so positively unstimulating, so drizzly-day, sky-on-the-ground boring, stultifying, and oppressive that it gives us a chance to talk. Talk about anything, but talk anyway. Weather-talk? Grand. Neighbour-talk? Its grand too only don't go too far with it. There are the odd ones who don't know when they have enough said and step on the accelerator when they should be tramping on the brake.

It's not the ordinary chatter I'm thinking of, though. Our parents, grandparents, and rambling neighbours have handed down to us a colourful and rich heritage, fact and fiction, lies and truth, product of memory, imagination, wit, intelligence and devilment. There were stories of ghosts and apparitions, fairies dancing on green hillocks, butter stolen from the milk of neighbour's cows, banshees, wise dogs who could almost talk, tales of small douse men with prodigious strength, and there were, especially, stories of the great wits in the locality. We must hand this on.

After all, it made the lives of generations who owned little, bearable and even enjoyable. I sometimes wonder what unction or appliance will be found to replace this cultural wonderland between the ears of a long faced and harassed brigade of the well-

tanned, new rich, who own things.

There were dozens of stories told around the fireside in Glenfarne about a character called Micky Walls. Micky was a semi-nomad, a vagrant 'worker' who worked with you today, dined with you and stayed that night or maybe a week depending on the work available, as far as the farmer was concerned, but depending on the quality of the food and the comfort of the bed as far as Micky was concerned.

Though he came looking for work he hated work and, to avoid it, used every device known to man. Famed for his wit however, he was shown an indulgence bordering on the heroic even by men who were in a hurry. But, if he side-stepped work, he had a positive aversion to the task of walking. Now, fortunately for Mr. Walls, he lived at a time when a stray ass would often be found grazing the long acre on the by-roads of Glenfarne. One regular stray was referred to, locally, as 'the County Surveyor'.

On a fateful evening, tired after a one mile walk, Micky saw the stray ass—a gift from Heaven, all his birthday presents on four legs. He caught him and climbed aboard. What he didn't know was that this poor ass had just done a hard days work and did not see his new burden as a gift from Heaven at all. After a short stretch of the road something happened. It seems God made asses too and even arranged that they would have the odd birthday. Billy spotted a branch growing out

from the side of the road and at the perfect height to allow him pass underneath while dislodging his rider. Straight away he made for the branch. Micky was grounded and Billy was free. But not for long. Micky broke a sturdy branch from the same offending roadside alder and proceeded to punish the ass vigorously—the sides, the rump, the sides. All of a sudden, a horse stopped beside him and the rider who dismounted was the local curate. This priest was, maybe a hundred years ahead of his time in that he was noted throughout the Diocese of Kilmore as an animal-rights enthusiast. What a telling-off he gave to Micky... a bad-tempered crass-grained savage tormenting the brute beast, a hob-nailed villain, ignorant to the beauty of God's creatures...ending up by saying, 'If you didn't respect God's brute beast you should at least have known that it was on an ass our good Lord rode into Egypt'. 'Did you know that?' Micky



was humbled, mortified yet, silent, but, before he waddled off along the road, he shouted up at the priest, now mounted on his horse, 'I knew that before you were born, Your Reverence, but if He had got up on this one He wouldn't be there yet'.

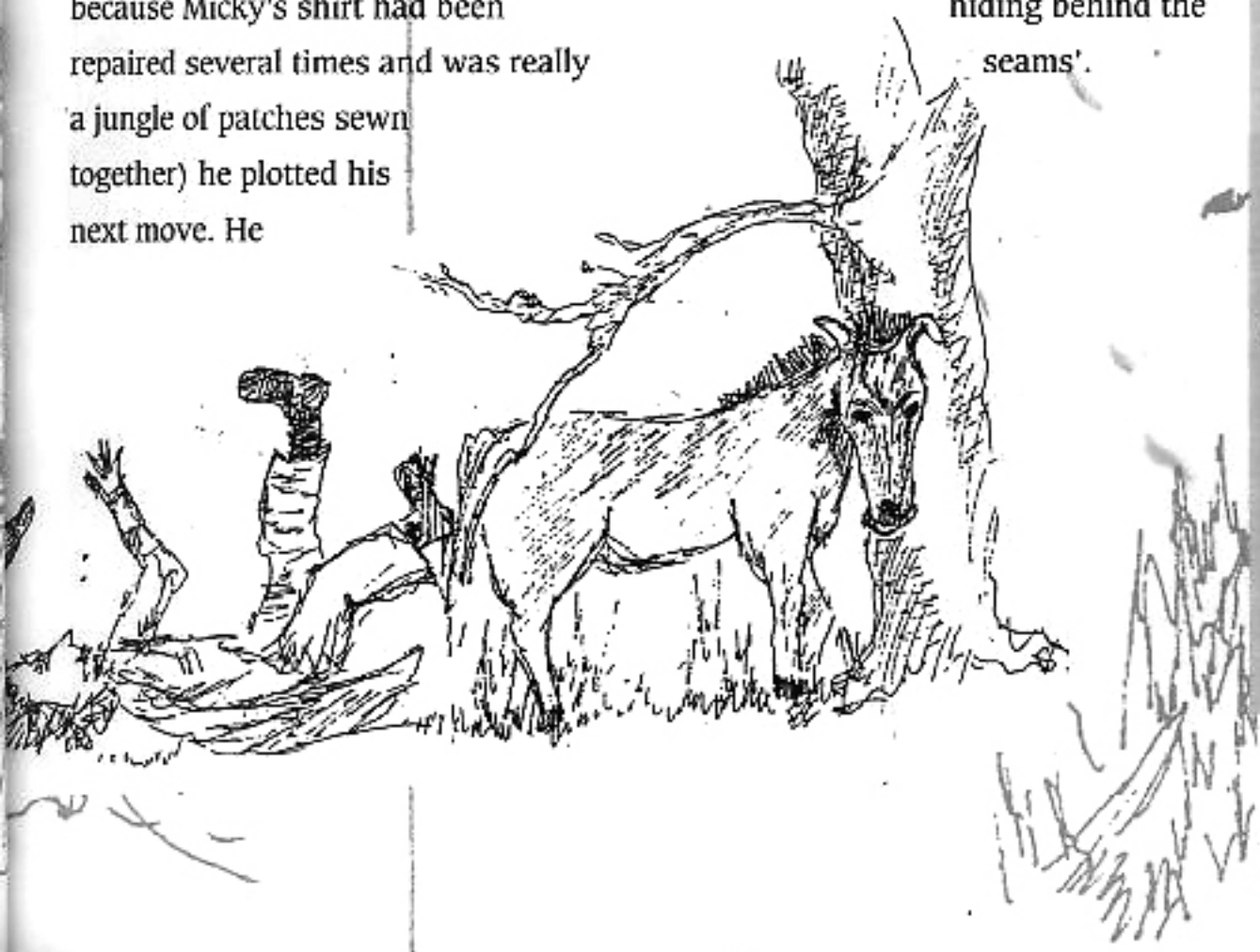
And, a final little anecdote concerning Mr Walls: Mickey liked his rest. He could sleep like a log, and neither barking dog nor crowing rooster could trouble his hearty dreams. But, in the times that were in it, he had sworn enemies who took to the battlefield just as he was nodding off each night. They could bite like crocodiles and leap seven hundred times their own height. I refer, of course, to the infernal villains of fleas. The house was quiet, the family asleep in their beds and Micky, in a bunk under the stairs, was nodding off when the biting started; cruel, incisive, persistent, and each bite seemed to come from hungrier jaws than those of his previous assailant. Finally, exasperated, he got up, searched the bed, with blue murder in his eyes. After a fruitless search, he realised that the whole colony were lurking somewhere in the shirt he was wearing.

Having established the general location of his enemy, (I say 'general' because Micky's shirt had been repaired several times and was really a jungle of patches sewn together) he plotted his next move. He

turned up the double—burner, put some dry sticks on the fire, got in front of it and started his search. He found several victims and as he executed them one by one, he exhausted his rich vocabulary of expletives in terms of 'sunburnt bassers', 'cross-eyed renegades', and 'blood suckers from Hell'. He addressed the last victims with particular venom using the names of Cavan farmers who worked him to the bone and fed him scraps... 'Your turn now Mick Brady, miserable dog... and now yours Pat Smith, with your thick head and thin gruel, shut your eyes now so the sparks wont blind you', 'Ah, is it yourself, growler Lynch? Hell roast you for... I'm thinking this isn't the last fire you'll go into...'

Finally, convinced that he had cleared the mine-field, he put on his shirt and went back to his bunk. Seconds passed. Minutes passed. He was starting to congratulate himself on a job well done when the nipping started again, one ferocious nip, then a second—an absolute deadener. He jumped out of his bed, ran for the fire, took off his shirt and rammed it in the middle of the blaze with a valedictory grunt,

'Now boys there'll be no more hiding behind the seams'.



THE GARDENER'S IF  
(WITH APOLOGIES TO RUDYARD KIPLING)

Sr Thomasina

*If you can keep your hoe when all about you  
Are losing their's and blaming it on you.  
If you can stick to it when some still doubt you  
And make allowance for their doubting too.  
If you can weed and not be tired by weeding  
Or being bent in two, don't deal in sighs  
Or getting scratches, don't give way to scratching,  
And yet, don't do too much, if you are wise.*

*If you can plant and not make plants your master,  
If you can prune, and not make prunes your aim,  
If you can take your work a little faster  
and treat your slower Sisters just the same.  
If you can bear to see the rose you planted  
Pulled by the roots to grace another's bed  
Or watch the bulbs you gave your time to,  
Scattered and stoop and pick them up  
with nothing said.*

*If you can plant a border of Sweet William  
And see them stolen from you, one by one  
And sigh and start again at the beginning  
And never breathe a word about that nun.  
If you can coax the Sisters working near you  
To help you when the others are long gone,  
And hold them there until there's not a weed left  
And tell them stories, just to cheer them on.*

*If you can take a catalogue and read it  
And know the names of all the flowers you see  
And how and when each one of them is tended  
And not confuse carnation with sweet pea  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of watering done  
Yours is the charge and everything that's in it  
And may you get your meed of rain and sur.*