

MEMORIES OF A PAST PUPIL

**Dan Fitzgerald: Student of St. Colman's College
[September 1910 - July 1915]**

**Dan Fitzgerald was a student
at the College from 1910 to
1915. His alma mater
welcomed him on a visit,
20th. October, 1982.**



Driving on the main road from Fermoy to Mallow before going on to Killarney, you come to the village of Ballyhooly with, in the words of an Irish lady returned after a lifetime of exile, its mountain, wood and river, its pastureland and cattle. I was born here in July 1898 and spent my boyhood and young manhood here. I attended the village school and received my First Communion and was confirmed in the village church.

When the time came for me to leave the National School, the master sent for my mother to discuss my future with her. He told her that I had a good head on my shoulders and that I ought to be more than a mere hewer of wood and drawer of water. He urged her to send me to St. Colman's College in nearby Fermoy.

I arrived in St. Colman's College with my mother for the first time in September, 1910 to be introduced to the then President, Canon Barrett, and the College housekeeper, Miss Kate. I was impressed by the building overlooking the town and the grand Blackwater flowing swiftly and silently by its meadows from Castlehyde to Carysville. There was no sign then of the 1969 extension. Part of the site of this extension was then occupied by the College gymnasium which, of course, had to be demolished to make way for the later building. I must say at this point that I believe that the beauty and general aspect of the College is greatly enhanced by the new extension.

I sat the scholarship examinations in September, 1910 and was awarded one of the scholarships open to incoming students. I quickly became part of the day-to-day life of the College. Fr. Jimmy Cotter was then Dean of Discipline, a man whom to this day I hold in the highest esteem. He was a marvellous hurler and I can never recall him failing to score from a 70. We had some great hurlers in those days and the senior team swept all before them. I can still remember many of them vividly. Pat Troy, the towering full back, Charlie "Togs" Murphy, the goalkeeper, "Boots" Barry, the full forward and the midfielders, Fr. Cotter and Dr. Sheehan. I remember these as a remarkable and exemplary bunch of boys and men, the cream of Irish manhood.

I remember vividly too members of the teaching staff. Fr. Danny O'Leary was a short, determined little man who compensated in temperament for what he might have lacked in stature. Fr. Johnny Cavanagh, "Johnny the Hawk" who, it was confidently claimed, could see clearly into the lower ball alleys from the terrace in front of the College.

There was a lunchtime break at noon for a snack consisting of a glass of milk and a slice of unbuttered bread and we all met in the College refectory to partake of this meagre fare. Here the priests took their meals at a separate table above and apart from the students but not far away enough for certain of their eating habits to

go unnoticed. Johnny the Hawk, for example, was partial to a bottle of Guinness with his midday snack. Bottled stout in those days was corked, not capped as it is today, and when Johnny drew the cork from his bottle we all imitated the resulting pop with our fingers in our mouths. For the sheer precision of its timing the result was rarely less than magnificent.

The food served in the College in those days was not wildly appetizing. Miss Kate was not over-concerned about hygiene and we drank from tin cups which were frequently chipped. She had two Scotch terriers which usually lay sprawled on the floor in front of the fire in her little office. We had to go to the office on Sunday mornings, the time set aside for letter writing, if we wanted notepaper or stamps. The terriers were vicious little brutes and I clearly remember, one Sunday morning as I approached Miss Kate's door, one of them snapped at my feet and ankles. I caught it with a good, solid kick and sent it scurrying away, complaining bitterly as it went. Miss Kate was quickly on the scene and, not knowing what else to do, I muttered something about stepping accidentally on the dog as it lay sleeping and being very sorry about it all. She appeared to believe what I was saying and simply warned me to be more careful in future. With my stamps in my fist and the door safely shut between Miss Kate and me, I executed the sign for which Harvey Smith became famous over half a century later.

Those damned dogs hated us and, as it happened, mine was not the only boot to be laid upon them.

I went to England to work in March, 1925 and have been living since then in Norwich, a lovely city in the county of Norfolk some sixteen miles from the East Anglian coast. I am proud of my association with St. Colman's and my frequent visits to the College have been met with a warmth and hospitality which I have always found most gratifying. I was delighted when my nephew, Dave Cahill, and my niece, Mrs. Heffernan of Fermoy, sent my grand-nephews to be students at St. Colman's. My grand-nephews, Mark, Austin and Luke Heffernan, are presently students there.

I record these events in a spirit of affection for the time, the place and especially the people whom I remember so vividly but who all have by now gone to their rewards. May God rest all their souls.

I would like to finish by extending warmest greetings to the President and all the priests of the College.

Dan Fitzgerald

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