

Foreword to Mr. Dooley in Peace and in War

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Mr. Dooley is a classic figure of American creation. He belongs with Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, Uncle Remus and Natty Bumppo, Paul Bunyan and Archie Goodwin. Each in his measure stands for a force in the making of the great continent and its culture. Although every one of them is marked by an unusual quality or character, they are all “of the people.” What Martin Dooley of Archey Road, Chicago, represents is the immigrant. He is Irish from Ireland and speaks Irish American. His memory is well stocked and he delivers judgments about his native country, as he does even more fully about the Irish who have made a corner of Chicago their own, a quarter he knows like the ward captain he once was. He keeps a liquor store without being the drunken Irishman of tradition, though he is tolerant of the breed when he encounters one. He is a bachelor, as he tells us with his usual gift for comparisons: “I know about marriage th’ way an astronomer knows about th’ stars.” We sample the riches of his mind through his conversations with his select friends, notably that other inquiring spirit, the elderly Mr. Hennessy.

That Mr. Dooley is little recognized by academic scholarship is a pity, because if he were he would be better known by those who go through college. But he is well enough known and much relished by connoisseurs of American history and folklore, and a sampling of his maxims fills two columns in *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*. I may add that the seven characters I have named are hardly thought of as they should be. Their separate existence in myth, tradition, and literature keeps them apart, but that does not change their common evocative role in the past and present mind of this country.

Thus the Dooley dialogues that Finley Peter Dunne published in the dozen years between 1898 and 1910 make up a panorama of local and world events as seen by a quizzical observer of the times. Mr. Dooley is shrewd, even astute, and tolerant, but limited as well. He lavishes without regard

to convention his sallies of uncommon common sense, but he is bound by certain inherited views that are narrow. In this regard he reminds one of Dr. Johnson, whom he resembles also in his power to utter final judgments in memorable words. One of these has found a place in the public domain: "The Supreme Coort follows th' iliction returns."

World history falls within Mr. Dooley's scope, because he comments freely on the news of the day. His gaze sweeps not only eastward to Washington, D.C., but also to Europe as far as Rooshia and westward to the Far East, then known as the Orient. His disquisitions fall into three general kinds. In some, he meditates on the vicissitudes of life for the working poor, their family ways and their moral and economic predicaments. Another group shows in vivid detail the politics of a big city, run as always by a well-entrenched group of professionals, who are united by corruption and supported by the votes of the poor, whom they support in turn by well-managed charity. The rest of the harangues set forth the decisions of Dooley the statesman, warnings or advice that the great powers, their leaders and generalissimos, will neglect at their peril.

Most often it is Mr. Hennessy who is the recipient, indeed, the provoker or Boswell of the discourse. His understanding is enlightened by such remarks as that "a man can't be indipindint onless he has a boss," which is why kings are so shackled and unhappy: they have no one to resent or resist. Occasionally, it is some other among Mr. Dooley's friends who informs the sage about current events, and they sometimes copy his turn for irony. When he asks young Hogan apropos of the Graeco-Turkish war of 1897: "How goes the war between th'ac-cursed infidel an' th' dog iv a Christian?" he is told: "Th' Greeks won a thremenjous battle, killin' manny millions iv th' Moslem murdherers, but was obliged to retreat thirty-two miles in a gallop." Hogan is saddened and he muses, "Whin I think iv Leonidas at th' pass in Thermometer... an' So-an'-so on th' field iv Marathon..." At other times Mr. Dooley indulges an impulse to satire, as when he thinks of John D. Rockefeller: "He is a kind of Society for th Prevention of Croolty to Money. If he finds a man misusin' his money, he takes it away fr'm him an' adopts it." Or again, turning his mind to college education: "Degrees

is good things because they livils all ranks.” But the satiric touch can be subtler and swifter, as when he notices the advent of canned goods at the turn of the century by referring to “a taste of solder in the peaches.” And on certain grave subjects he speaks in the most direct way: “I freed the slave, Hennessy, but faith, I think ’twas like turnin’ him out of the pantry into the cellar.

“You can’t do ennythin’ more f’r him than make him free.

“Ye can’t, Hennessy, only whin ye tell them they’re free, they kno-ow we’re only stringin’ them.”

A favorite Dooleyism is to set up a difference of opinion with Hennessy that leads to a clincher in the last line. For one of these, turn in this book to “The Victorian Era” and read the last three paragraphs. To quote the passage here would be to spoil it for later on. Mr. Dooley made his first appearance in substantial form in the present volume, dated 1898. The United States was waging the Spanish-American War in a frenzy of jingoism. The popular mind, overheated by the press, was all for expansion and empire, and as usual with American wars, the nation was in a flurry improvising the means rather than carrying out a matured plan. Mr. Dooley scanned the scene with a critical eye and derisive words. For the reader today, the first third of this collection, all about the war, will afford rather less pleasure than the rest, because many of the telling points depend on what Admiral Dewey or General Shafter said or did as they girded for battle in Cuba or the Philippines.

“Mr. Dooley in Peace” makes up for this lesser dose of amusement by the intimacy of its portrayal of Irish life, both here and in the home country. Philosopher that he is, Mr. Dooley is not uncritical in his sympathy with those rural attitudes that have been transplanted to the huge industrial city. Some ancestral traits annoy him and he is able to admire their opposite among the Germans who have come to Archey Road and, by greater thrift and steadiness, are displacing the Irish. Here again is American history in miniature.

These subjects of the “Peace” section then modulate into the variety of concerns with national and world affairs mentioned earlier For the adventur-

ous reader, let it be noted that in the six other gatherings of observations by Mr. Dooley his wisdom deepens as his range widens still farther. This, we may suppose, is the natural effect of accumulated experience and reflection in a superior mind, and it proves once more that Martin Dooley was and is a live creation.