

Once again are we returned to the memory of our more barbarous selves, with blood on the barracks and the attentions of the world re-settled upon the little trouble up North. That Polish men should be caught up in a quarrel thought settled from long before their arrival and of a manner well beyond the understanding of any national person surely plays up the folly in that madness of Craigavon and Massereene, resultant of which [amongst what else one may only tremble at] Peter and Martin stood bravely before the world as one and postponed going to Washington for their 'investment trip'. Actually, the very idea of going to Washington for an 'investment' trip may have given some pause. It may have given others cause for what Robert Peston could term 'compound pessimism'. Handouts for Ulster must be about as high up the agenda in Washington as the task of building a national monument out of sausage.

Pointless political junkets aside, one has to hope, and after Alistair 'Oh, thank you-' Darling's budget and the pig-sniffle epidemic news, everyone is in need of a little tinder for the grate, or at least a little green on the horizon. April may be the cruellest month and May be our last, but we denizens of Eire can always look back to March and smile wanly, for in March the Hibernian is king for a day. Indeed, the cock crew on the 17th of the month and right on cue came the comely St. Patrick astride his Hi-Ace parade float, clanking down the thin streets of Ireland as the country's heckling youth rained a blessing of Magners bottles upon it, setting the babes-on-shoulders to tears, and consideration of 10 where on earth they are going to emigrate once this childhood business is done. We all have the mental pictures – news reports of the ceremonial offering of a bowl of own-brand watercress to Yank Sahib in the Big House; the scurf of chip-wrappers along the streets; the grey tarp of the clouds...so many tourists to rob, and so little time.

St. Patrick's day celebrations in London are little better. They serve only to lure heavily lagered-up antipodeans out of 'Roundabout' chain bars and into Trafalgar Square, to wave about those Guinness hats they give out at mental retardation clinics. There,

The shaming of the green

Cian O'Neill writes from London

mingling with the Spanish students not attending that Grand Opening of a crisp packet in the Bromley branch of Lidl [or anything that involves people getting together in a public place to wear suede, sing and take photographs of each other singing while wearing suede] they set to crowing out a few songs like Galway Bay before some woebegotten 'trad' band kicks off a conscientiously-ignored half-hour set of reels on some five-foot square stage strategically positioned at some safe distance from the nice clean National Gallery [in the Fountain, say], and the rain comes on. Yes, even in England, God is an Orangeman.

It must be admitted that St. Patrick, for all his way with snakes and popery, has been something careless in the matter of the preservation of his good name. Invoked to justify any orgy of drink-taking, be it in Philadelphia or Perth, it is a shoddy name left this particular saint. He is overdue a Max Clifford-engineered PR rebirthing. No more silly hats, no more rivers of whisky, just God/God/God until all the laughter's dead.

Those looking for laughter in London on the great day would have been disappointed. The traditional stalking grounds for London Irish are no longer quite what they were, it would seem. Camden went to hell in fishnets back when punk was a pup, and with all the opium fiends straggling the main drag from the art-deco Forum venue at the top of Kentish Town, back down the hill to the mustard-brick walls along Camdens canal, one would be hard pressed to find many 'Paddys'. Those few left are old and broken; those gone having been [finally] accepted / integrated within the meld of modern England, which now asks, like modern Ireland, for university-educated Poles to come and do the menial work such as the home-delivery of deep-pan pizzas. The difference is that it doesn't shoot them for their efforts.

All such careful critique aside, worry ye not for your London correspondent did his duty on the 17th, resolute as a skittle in a crosswind at his post on the Oxford Street traffic island from which little patch that shall be [sort-of] forever-Ireland be berated the foul English for their lack of *panache* between maudlin self-mutterings and convulsive, drunken sobs. 'Dulce et decorum est...', indeed...

