

Here is Ireland's past distilled - poignant personal narratives and privileged moments, human behaviour recorded in its infinite variety, voices overheard: chamber music. In these pages Elizabethan adventurers, fops, soldiers, widows, landlords, republicans, poets, hedge-school masters and literary lesbians seem to dance through 400 years of Irish history. National events - the siege of Limerick, the battle of the Boyne, Wexford in 1798, the Famine, literary revival, 1916 Rising and Civil War - commingle with details of individual lives - procreation and recreation, courtship, food, clothing, religion, privation, death. Diaries of Ireland is an intimate history of everyday life on this island, a feast for mind and imagination. It is altogether an enterprise truly unique; we have not one guinea, we have not a tent; we have not a horse to draw our four pieces of artillery; the General-in-Chief marches on foot, we leave all our baggage behind us; we have nothing but the arms in our hands, the clothes on our backs, and a good courage, but that is sufficient - we are all gay as larks. - Theobald Wolfe Tone, 24 December 1796 A Levee at the Castle, attended as usual by pimps, parasites, hangers-on, aidecamps, state officers, expectant clergymen, hungry lawyers, spies, informers, and the various descriptions of characters that constitute the herd of which the motley petty degraded and pretended Court of this poor fallen country is made up. Alas, poor Ireland. - Sir Vere Hunt, 4 June 1813 Well, [Patrick] Kavanagh has come and gone: like the monsoon, the mistral, Hurricane Annie: things will never be quite the same again, even if it only meant that somebody told Lady Bellew to shut up, and went on to declare later that he hates Prods. - Frank McEvoy, 4 March 1958 This is the stuff of history, direct, real, stimulating and amusing. An excellent anthology. - Bruce Arnold, Irish Independent There is a great deal to interest in this well-produced volume, it whets the appetite for more. - Catriona Crowe, Sunday Tribune

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