

ANTHONY T. LUCAS

The Academic Position of European Ethnology in Ireland

A CHAIR OF FOLKLORE WAS FOUNDED in University College, Dublin, in 1946, but the Professor appointed, Professor S. O'Duilearga, has devoted his whole time to his post as Honorary Director of the Irish Folklore Commission and has, accordingly, been in a position to give only occasional lectures on the subject in the University. Thus folklife studies do not form a specific part of the academic curriculum in any University in the Republic of Ireland but there are two institutions which deal with them, the National Museum of Ireland and the Irish Folklore Commission, although the subject is not the sole preoccupation of either.

The Commission, through its personnel and field collectors, has amassed an enormous corpus of written documentation on Irish rural civilization. A very considerable fraction of this consists of matter dealing with material culture in all its aspects. In view of the comparative lack of fruitful printed sources, this corpus of information forms an exceedingly valuable reservoir of information on Irish ethnology. In addition, the Commission also maintains a large archive of photographic records of various aspects of material culture.

The National Museum of Ireland has been systematically building up a collection of folklife objects for more than thirty years. This collection is now tolerably representative of all aspects of Irish material and the area coverage throughout the country is reasonably uniform. Allowing for the fact that, owing to a number of historical and economic reasons, Irish folklife material does not in any way compare in richness or variety with that of most European countries, the general position in regard to this collection is satisfactory and new items are being continuously added to it. The Museum policy also embraces a photographic archive and, in recent years, a programme of filming techniques and operations which are in danger of extinction has been embarked upon.

Questionnaires are also circulated to a countrywide body of correspondents from time to time for the purpose of collecting data on special subjects.

Although there is, as yet, no National Folk Museum, the Government has made available a site in Dublin for this purpose. It contains the finest 17th century building still existing in the country and which was originally built as an hospital for old soldiers. This is being restored and will house the systematically arranged collection of folklife objects, while the ground will be developed for the display of reconstructed houses and other outdoor exhibits.

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