

## COMMENTARY

THE EXILED IRISH. You may see them any Sunday, standing in the back at the last Mass, in new raincoats, with rosaries in their hands. And you wonder afresh at the fidelity of so many of the Irish, in a strange land, clinging to the loyalties that meant so much at home, which in England, as they soon discover, can mean nothing at all. The others you do not see, not in church that is to say: and it is idle to ignore the sad fact that thousands of Irish exiles are lost to the Church, caught up so soon in the world of their fellows at work, of the people in the streets.

The problems of Irish emigration are not just a matter of economics, though the paralysed incapacity of successive Irish governments to deal with this constant drain on the youth of the nation seems now to be accepted as inevitable. Emigration is deplored, but it happens; and it would seem that the time has come for its implications to be accepted realistically—first in Ireland, before the young people leave, and then in this country, when they arrive. And this is quite specially a matter for Catholic concern, since the equation of the Church with the sanctions of a responsible and moral life is still absolute in Ireland. Wrenched away from the traditional allegiance of the Mass, the Irish in England are exiles in the saddest sense: unequipped to meet a situation so different from any they have known, they can fall victims to the easy way—not out of much malice, but simply because they are wholly unprepared.

The issues here are grave ones—impossible to state without the risk of causing offence. But it is plain that the accepted pattern of Irish Catholicism, however valid it may still be for those who remain at home, is scarcely equal to the strains of life in a secularized society. It should at least be possible for those who have to leave to be given an accurate picture of what they can expect to find: and the older children at school should surely be led more courageously towards that adult and responsible practice of the faith which life in England certainly demands today—and which, for that matter, life in Ireland will equally demand in the future. And there should be a much more effective system of information, by which the Irish on arrival in England could be assured of a

welcome into the local Catholic community at a crucial moment in their lives.

It is here that the contribution of English Catholics can be all-important. It is good news that a social centre for Irish Catholics is being established in London, and the multiplication of other centres—in such towns as Coventry, Birmingham, Luton and Leicester—could do much to create that communal life which Catholic practice so properly demands. But there will remain the crowds of exiled Irish, silent and uncommitted, at Mass in the local churches. For them—and to begin with almost every Irish boy and girl is to be found among their numbers—the existing parish should assume much greater, and much more generous, responsibilities. The Mass is more than a ritual obligation: it is the gathering of the faithful, the unitive expression of their faith, hope and—above all—of their charity. That is why the anonymous dispersal of the people of God when Mass is over is more than a social weakness: it is a failure to see the deeper meaning of what the Mass is meant to achieve. The unity of the worshippers about the altar should find an echo in the wider world beyond it. For the Irish, or any other people at all, are never strangers in the house of God, and it should be a constant concern of their English brethren that they are not made to seem so.

**OBSCENITY AND THE LAW.** The advocates of a revision of the existing law on obscenity, confused as it is in principle and most erratic in practice, are likely to find the doctrine of 'intention' very difficult to define. It is certain that the crucial point lies here: an author (and publisher) can be reasonably asked to provide proof that his purpose is not primarily to corrupt. An arbitrary list of books thought likely to corrupt can only reflect the greatly varying standards of those who draw it up. As Mr T. S. Eliot once remarked, 'The Roman (and Communist) idea of an index of prohibited books seems to me perfectly sound in principle. It is a question (a) of the goodness and universality of the cause, (b) of the intelligence that goes to the application.' One cannot feel any great confidence that a secular state can fulfil these conditions.