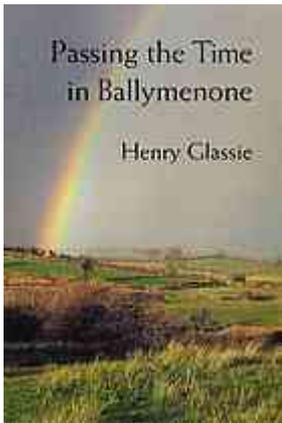


Fermanagh Time



This time of year the days lengthen, the clocks go forwards, and busy people have for once an excuse for being late. Not so in Fermanagh. Here the rhythm never changes; it is constant all year round. Summer or winter, you may wait half an hour for someone to turn up – and if you chance to wonder aloud what is keeping them, then people wag their heads and say, “Ah, Fermanagh Time.”

Fermanagh Time gives us the dark winter mornings that keep us in our beds, and the long summer evenings that keep us out of them. A hundred years ago, when British Summer Time was new, there was New Time, Old Time and Fermanagh Time – or as some called it *God’s Own Time* – when the sun was always highest at noon. Old Time – Greenwich Mean Time – was then not all that old. It came with the railways, and most people who didn’t need to catch trains still went by God’s Own Time. Fermanagh is seven and a half degrees West, so here by Greenwich Time the sun rises and sets half an hour later than it should.

Time is a strange thing, like manna in the wilderness. We each get it at the same rate – twenty-four hours each day, neither more nor less, and if we are lucky, that happens maybe three thousand times in our lifetime. We may measure it in different different ways and spend it in different ways, but we cannot save it for ‘later’. ‘Later’ is just more time that must be spent. Of course, it makes no sense to spend time doing things that we neither enjoy nor profit from. If such things need to be done, we can always pay other people to do them. But then we have to spend time working to pay them, and time waiting for them to show up. What is the point in working at something you don’t want to do, in order that others should work at something they do not want to do?

Time has to be spent, and if life is worth living then it has to be spent in a way that allows us to live all the time. Perhaps we in Fermanagh have always known that, because of the weather. The grass will grow when it grows, the turf will dry when it dries – probably later than we expect, but that’s Fermanagh Time for you. We may be glad when it’s early, but we can not rely on it. In the meantime, there is time to be passed. To get an idea of how we used to do that, read some of the books Henry Glassie wrote about his time here in the 1970’s – many of which are available in Enniskillen Library.

Perhaps we are beginning to catch ourselves on; to appreciate once again the

value of slow: slow food, slow reading, slow gardening, slow streets, slow architecture. Four or five times each summer I give hospitality to passing cycle tourists – people who have travelled slowly through all corners of the world, sometimes for months, even years at a time, and on a budget of perhaps £5 a day. From them too I have learned how little we need to pass the time well: clean water, decent food, dry clothes, and most of all, a safe place to rest and make friends. There is no reason why anyone should be denied these things. With just this much secure, the poorest person is willing to freely give of their time, because they will have more time tomorrow. From that time, freely given, has come all the art and culture in the world.

People don't just like to do things that are easy and fun. If there is no great penalty for failure, most want to challenge themselves, to try something that might just possibly work until they succeed. Once in a while they may produce a genuine and original work of art. It's not so much a matter of making as of growing. This being Fermanagh, it will probably take longer than you might have expected, but that doesn't matter. There is all the time in the world.

To paraphrase David Graeber, the most productive thing to do with stuff is to help grow people: curious people, inventive people, kind people; the sort of people you would want to have around you in your old age. That takes a lot of time, the right sort of time.

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Jenny Brien Editor