LIKE NO OTHER: The past 12 months have been a lost year and a year of loss

Reflecting on a year of keeping on keeping on

Anita ROBINSON

IT MAY have escaped your notice Dear Reader, that this is National Day of Reflection. What exactly we're being asked to reflect upon is not made clear, but I presume it's meant as a kind of stocktaking exercise to gauge the public mood, quantify our communal degree of fed-uppedness and calibrate our personal scale of 'thole'. Along with filling in the compulsory census form, Authority is now recommending a voluntary census of the mind. Hmm... In order to 'reflect', I'd have to clean my mirrors first.

Meanwhile, all Nature, oblivious to coronavirus, is in resurgence. There are fat buds on my cherry trees and catkins on the willow. My braggart blackbird has finally made an honest woman of the meek little brown hen bird and I hourly expect the annual return of starlings who, despite repeated eviction orders, nest in my downspout and poo down the pebbledash.

Fitful bursts of spring sunshine reveal the blurred edges of my furniture. I presume it's just that my specs need wiping, but factually it's a miasma of dust on the furniture and a coat of winter glar on outdoor windowsills and paving stones. I'll have to send for the grass-cutting man, the power-washing man and the gutter-cleaning man. Once, these were all embodied in that Man For All Seasons, the Loving Spouse, who rarely complained – and never charged a penny for services rendered. But I digress...

What a year it's been! A lost year. A year of loss. And what have we lost? Near ones, dear ones, physical contact, education, employment and travel; leisure, culture, freedom of movement – and hope. It's been a social wipeout. Thrown upon one's own resources it's alarming to discover how few one has. How reliant we are upon stability, on routine, on facilities, on connectedness – all the elements that qualify as 'quality of life'.

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How have I used my time? Reader, I've frittered it away, ingloriously and without regret. Truth to tell, I've taken 'backsliding' to previously unplumbed depths. The novelty of 'lying in' never palls. Only conscience guarantees my keeping the house habitable. That, and the risk of dying in the night and the shame of being discovered to have lived in squalor. 'To do' lists written with sincere intent are ignored in lassitude. Spontaneous (and rare) bursts of energy are applied to unnecessary tasks, viz polishing brass doorknobs rather than washing the windows or mopping the kitchen floor.

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Strange dinners are cobbled up out of whatever's on its 'use by' date. My flabby resolve melts like an ice cream Mars bar (another of my lockdown indulgences) as the enormity of any major task proves insuperable – and anyway, there's a double bill of *Salvage Hunters* on one of the Sky channels. Having been nowhere and done nothing, I've little to exchange with friends but the comparative size of our respective phone bills and the guilty frequency of delivery of online purchases.

Conversations with contemporaries are a medical poker game: "See your rheumatoid arthritis and raise you my heart condition," a frame of mind but one step away from an elderly relative whose sole lugubrious literary curiosity was discovering "who's dead in the paper?"

My previously neatly compartmentalised life is disintegrating by the day, my concentration shot to shreds and my memory fast turning into a forgettery. "You told me that yesterday Mumma," says Daughter Dear on the phone, her tone of ill-concealed irritation. She already considers me semi-senile.

In my less self-pitying moments I feel for the young – their education interrupted, cheated of freedom, fun and the unwise indulgences of adolescence through which they learn common sense and a modicum of wisdom. I'm grateful too for the help, support and generosity of friends and the random kindnesses of neighbours.

I'm looking positively on this protracted period of nothingness as a long-postponed 'gap year', never thinking I'd have to wait this long. I've done nothing more heroic than keep on keeping on. Surely that's enough.

ON THIS DAY

MARCH 23 1921

Roslea's Night of Terror

DUBLIN Castle states: A general attack was made by Sinn Feiners and Loyalists in the Roslea district of County Fermanagh last night. William Goldon, Rathkeevan and Samuel Nixon, Tattymore, were shot dead. Three dwelling-houses were burned down and other houses wrecked. Some arms were taken from a Loyalist.

Our Newbliss correspondent says: Things apparently went well at Roslea since the burning of the Catholic houses, the Catholic population avoiding anything to cause further trouble. On St Patrick's evening, a local Unionist farmer, having some hot words over recent events, drew his revolver and struck people on the heads with it.

Monday night saw more disorder when armed raiders visited the house of Samuel Nixon, Tattymore, about 11 p.m. He is alleged to have been fired at through the window and slightly wounded but the raiders entered and took him to the front where he was shot dead in the presence of his wife. The latter, in an effort to save her husband, was shot and wounded in the hand, one of her fingers being completely severed. The deceased leaves a family of six.

The house of William Gordon, a caretaker on the Springrove Estate was then visited. Gordon was standing with his back to the fire when he was shot dead through a window. The house of a widow named Douglas of Aghafin was also visited and a son Joseph taken out and fired at. He was wounded so seriously that Dr S A D'Arcy had him removed to Clones Hospital.

The work of burning was then entered upon and the first house visited was that of Edward Nelson, Mullaghconnolly, which was set on fire by the raiders. Nelson and his two sons escaped. Thomas Lester of Mullaglass was next visited and his house burned to ashes. Lester is a brother of George Lester, the Roslea merchant who was fired and wounded a month ago. Other burnings are reported.

Specials had poured into Roslea. Two young men named Toal and Boylan have been arrested. The country is being scoured by Specials and all the inhabitants of Roslea have fled, fearing the complete wiping out of the town. **(The dark days before partition marked by serious outbreaks of sectarian violence on the Fermanagh-Monaghan border involving both the new Special Constabulary and the IRA. This report describes a series of IRA attacks on local B Specials and reprisals by the USC in the nationalist village.)**

Specials Deployed

THIRTY Ulster Specials having arrived from Newtownards, a police station was reopened in the Bogside district of Derry yesterday. The Bogside is a nationalist area.

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