

'Moving slowly across the crest of a gentle hill, man, plough and horses are silhouetted against the evening sky. They seem like shadowy ghosts from a dim era that have returned as a quiet reminder to a world crazed and dominated by speed.'

from : 'At Slieve Gullion's Foot'.

'From Dromintee at Slieve Gullion in South Armagh to Glenhull in North Tyrone cannot be more than eighty miles; but when moving in Ireland to take up residence distance cannot be assessed in mere miles.'

from : 'Tyrone Folk Quest'

'The cold was intense: winter had resharpended its claws of snow and was holding on. Then it began to rain out of a leaden sky. And then I was at Peter's house, the last residence next to the immense heath of the mountain.'

from : 'Tyrone Folk Quest' (a visit to the house of Peter Pat Roe in Glenlark).

'When I think of the mountainy man's pastimes I'm reminded of the story of the man who worked for a mountainy woman. She said to him: "You can rest yourself after your dinner, digging the garden for me". Work of some sort was his true pastime.'

From : 'Ulster Folk of Field and Fireside'.

'Slieve Gullion is off the official route of the tourist; but the scenery of the area is unequalled. It breathes a mood found nowhere else in Ireland.'

from : 'Ulster Folk of Field and Fireside'.

'Three coldest things in the world'.

A frog.

A dog's nose.

A woman's elbow.'

From : 'Now You're Talking ...' (no. 130).

Dusk was on Cloughinna now, most mystical place of the valley. On one of its rocks a fairy thorn rose as if to beat the embers of a burnt-out sky-line dropping behind it. Here the crimson knots of a cloud were turning purple; while further on, nearer Slieve Gullion, a roof and its chimney in bronze-edged silhouette dribbled smoke against a brandy sky. A faint whisper of petal perfume sweetened the air; and as we rose to go, each corncrake sounded like the other's echo.'

from : 'Mountain Year'

'Now the sun was coming through over Slieve-na-Bola, and it made brassy rods in the stairs of cloud. The rods seemed to fill and sag, swinging to earth, to rock and field, breaking on the high-flung houses of The Hip of Carnagore and the surrounds of dead bracken. It broke, too, on Glen Dhu and Balmadda; and the sight was somehow like the sensation of the cry of blood to blood in an awareness of kinship and renewed greeting. At such a moment of Spring's awakening I know again that these townlands have wrought their mould, past and present, into my character. Not even the isolated rocks are inarticulate just then.'

from : 'Mountain Year' (Spirit of a Spring Morning).

'The Meeting of The Two Giants

A giant in Munster heard of a giant in Ulster and set out to meet and kill the Ulster giant.

When they met the Ulster giant says: 'Yesterday I killed seven with one blow.'

The Munster giant decided he had heard enough and at once set back for Munster.

The Ulster giant didn't tell him that it was seven flies he had killed!

from : 'Now You're Talking ...' (no. 81).

A full case study compiled by Kevin Murphy on Michael J Murphy can be downloaded from our website: www.sagp.org

MICHAEL J. MURPHY

The Last Druid

1913 – 1996

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'Three things one should do every year – listen to a storyteller at a fireside, give a hand in a corn harvest field and climb an Irish mountain.'

Michael J. Murphy
'Mountain Year'



Quotations

from Michael J. Murphy

'It is unfair to say that the younger generation do not love the Irish traditions when they have not had a proper opportunity or inducement to hear them and to take pride in them.'

from : 'Can we call back the Ceilidhe House?'
– Hibernia (October 1944)

'It has become fashionable to disdain appreciation of the countryside, to subjugate its beauty to the indiscriminate demands of commerce.'

from : 'The Landscape and its Literature'
–Hibernia (July 1939)

'The hiring fair is the only channel through which farm labour of both sexes must trudge to seek work in districts outside their own locality; about them, on the hiring grounds rests the embarrassment of the slave.'

from : 'Abolish the Hiring Fair'
–Hibernia (November 1939)

'...the spirit of the mountain breathed out of the clay I turned, and hours of labour went by without any knowledge of toil.'

from : 'Mountain Year' ('I Live on a Mountain')

'He called a spade a spade and every beggarman "sir".'

from : 'Harvest Tokens on a Kitchen Dresser' ('Mountain Year')
Michael was speaking about his employer and neighbour, Tom Dunne.

'It is a treat and a delight to converse with the old people. Their sincerity is genuine and infectious and does one good. Although they are not Gaelic speakers here, the influence of the native tongue and tradition is yet strong enough to give their speech an air and a feeling of old worth and dignity.'

from : 'At Slieve Gullion's Foot'.

Chronology of a full life

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| 1913 - Born Eden Street, Liverpool. | 1960s - Returned to live in Dromintee, South Armagh. |
| 1922 - Came home to Dromintee, South Armagh. | 1964 - 'Mountain Year' published. |
| 1926 - Left Dromintee National School to work as a farm labourer. | 1971 - Began to work for the Department of Irish Folklore, University College, Dublin. |
| 1930s - Writing articles and short stories for various newspapers and periodicals | 1973 - 'Tyrone Folk Quest' published. |
| 1938 - First broadcast : 'The Goatmen of South Armagh'. | 1975 - 'Now You're Talking' published. |
| 1941 - Publication of 'At Slieve Gullion's Foot'. | 1976 - 'Mountain Crack' published. |
| 1942 - Began to collect material on a part-time basis for the Folklore Commission. | 1983 - 'Ulster Folk of Field and fireside' published. Retired from the Department of Irish Folklore, U.C.D. |
| 1944 - Ceased to work as a farm labourer. | 1984 - Recorded a cassette of readings from his work for the Arts Council. Moved, with Alice, to Walterstown, Castlebellingham, Co. Louth. |
| 1949 - Moved to Glenhull, Co. Tyrone, with his wife Alice and children to work as a full-time collector for the Folklore Commission. | 1987 - 'Rathlin : Island of Blood and Enchantment' published. |
| 1950s - Working in the Glens of Antrim, Rathlin Island and the Mournes. | 1989 - 'My Man Jack' published. |
| 1954 - First play 'Dust Under Our Feet' produced in the Group Theatre, Belfast, and in the Arts Theatre, London. | 1990 - 'Sayings and Stories of Slieve Gullion' published. |
| 1959 - Play 'Men on the Wall' produced in the Group Theatre and the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. | 1992 - 'The Rising of Yalla Ned and Other Stories' published. |
| | 1996 - Died at Walterstown. Buried in Darver cemetery. |

