

## A Word or Two

Among the people of St. John's and the southern outports some may still speak with an Irish accent. Scholars have fixed it as that of County Wexford.

In the north of the island the intonations are English, the voices of Dorset or Devon three centuries past.

The ones with the brogue have many words in Irish still: *ballyrag* (abuse), *blather* (nonsensical talk), *dudeen* (a pipe), *jackeen* (a rascally boy), *omadhaun* (a foolish person), *pishoque* (an unlikely story).

The northerners still use English words long lost in England: *scrimshank* (evasive hesitation), *switchel* (cold tea), *tuckamore* (a low clump of trees).

The Irish vocabulary is rich in one-word descriptions of particular people, usually unflattering. Most begin with the letter *s*—*sadogue*, a fat, easygoing person; *scut*, a dirty, mean one; *shooneen*, a coward; *slieveen*, a deceitful person.

The Newfoundlanders also have their own aphorisms. "An honest man when there are no anchors around," is, of course, ironic. Most of the sayings speak for themselves: "A fisherman is one rogue, a merchant is many." "In a leaky punt with a broken oar, 'tis always best to hug the shore."

Some require explanation—"Nofty was forty when he lost the pork," for example, does not concern a middle-aged man who lost a pig. Nofty was holding a trump and close to winning when he lost the game of cards—never be sure of anything or, as a mainlander might say, don't count your chickens.

