

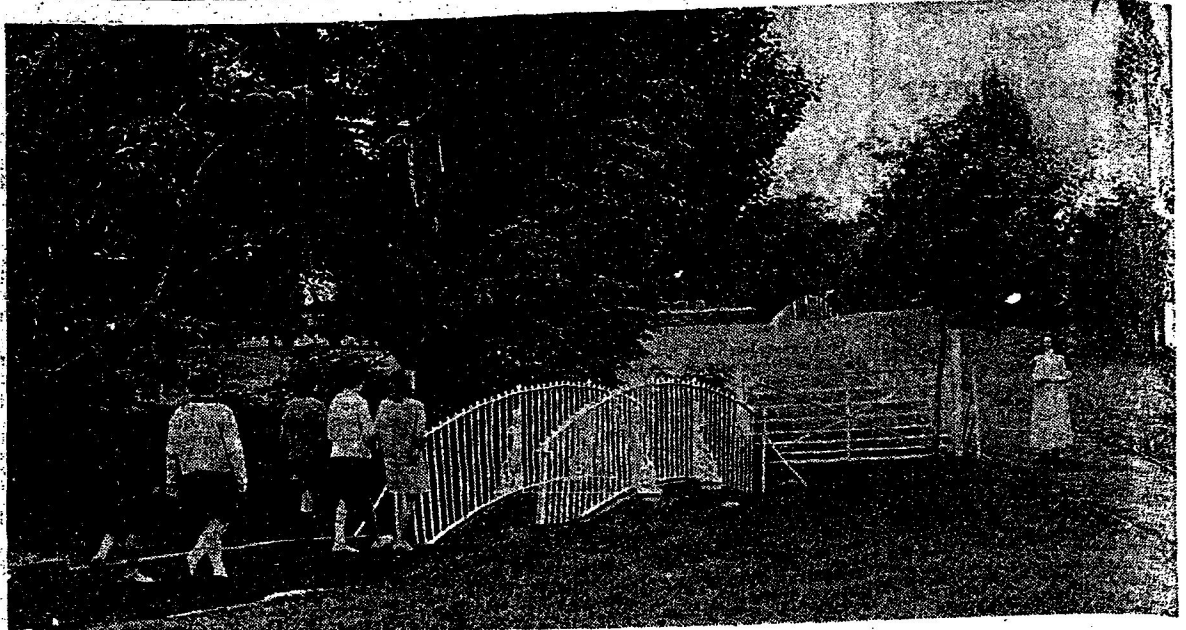
# HIGH PARK: LAUNDRY WITH A DIFFERENCE

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## WOMEN

### FIRST

WOMEN'S EDITOR:  
MARY MAHER.

But I'm thrilled to be here. Not gushingly thrilled, just thrilled. I feel guilty. One's left one's child and husband and home. If only one could get him over, one could stay a few days longer. It's terribly exciting. I'd love to see 'The Cherry Orchard.'

"I think your tomatoes are wonderful and your Guinness too." There was a bag of tomatoes on the stage. And, the last word as she dashed over to Groome's for lunch: "Guinness? It's different here. I think it's a better water. . . ."

*Pictures by Gordon Standing*

HIGH PARK is a laundry that gives off emotional rather than any other kind of steam. It doesn't look like a laundry and its setting isn't a conventional industrial one. But it is for its highly efficient service that it has become known to north city Dubliners.

Run by the nuns and girls of St. Mary's Home, it is part of a large group of buildings on a 15-acre farm in Drumcondra. It's on the high ground above Griffith avenue and the mountains are clearly visible on the worst of days. A pleasant spot for either convent or laundry.

The convent and grounds were bought by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, a French order, for £300 in 1857. They've been building on and off since. Now 57 nuns and 150 women and girls live there. St. Mary's, the main building apart from the convent itself, is a home for "training and rehabilitating adolescent girls with social problems." This is the main purpose of High Park; the laundry is essential if the complex, that includes a hostel, is to survive financially.

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"THERE ARE very serious problems in Dublin if we could only get our hands on them. Girls arriving up here from the country with no money and nowhere to go. They're found rambling around and then they're referred to us. Sensible and nice girls go to the Gardaí and they send them here; others come through the Legion of Mary or social workers." Sister Theresa and two of the other nuns have just finished their social science degree course at U.C.D. They feel that more accommodation is needed—"even if it's only for girls who get stranded in the city and will only stay for one night.

We try to encourage them to stay for training so that they'll be able to find a job."

Some of the girls have been in St. Mary's for years. In the school they are taught the basic school subjects as well as domestic science and, sometimes, typing. "Many are barely literate when they arrive and we just do what we can with them. The results are good but it's not easy. They need an awful lot of help; they're so insecure. Some have no family and many have no family ties of any sort. A few come from very good homes but they have, perhaps, got into trouble and are sent here by their parents for safety. If they have a family we try to sort things out and send them back; but as a rule they haven't got one."

The number of girls who can really be rehabilitated is small; the nuns try to keep these in a group together. If it is felt that the girls have become sufficiently mature, emotionally, to take a job, they leave St. Mary's and move to the hostel which was built in the grounds two years ago. It is bright and airy with a launderette and kitchen. The girls help out with the cooking. There is no staff — only Sister Benignus.

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IN THE HOSTEL, the nuns charge the girls £3 a week for a room, two meals a day and full meals at weekends. "We take even less from the girls who have

just begun to work because they don't have much. We're more interested in the social side than in the money."

Sixteen girls have already passed through the hostel. They are now fully rehabilitated and leading normal lives, living with specially selected families outside. "We try to make them responsible enough to hold down a job. It's only as they move from step to step that you can see them develop. There's a marvellous change in them in two years. The brightest girls are now working in shops and offices but they all return to the (hostel's) club in the evenings. Some come back to the hostel for holidays, although we encourage them to go away together." The brightly decorated club is open to outsiders and girls from the neighbourhood go there in the evenings.

High Park is operated voluntarily at all levels. The girls are there of their own accord. "In the U.S. girls can be sent by special agencies, such as a court, to homes like this, but they are compelled to stay there for a year and a half. This enables an organised programme to be arranged and ensures that something can be done with the girls. Here, special training is difficult because the girls are free to leave any time they like."

In England a person can be assigned for care until she is 18. "Here, they can be out of control

as much as they like and nothing can be done." Since High Park is neither a school nor an industrial school, it is not recognised as eligible for a grant and the nuns don't receive one.

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THE GIRLS in St. Mary's don't pay anything for their keep but the nuns, apart from giving them pocket money and cigarettes, don't pay for the girls the work they do in the laundry.

The laundry is run on a wholly commercial basis. A manager and several men are employed. The girls who do most work are those who have been there for a considerable length of time; these are unlikely to be rehabilitated sufficiently to leave the home.

Because the labour is largely unskilled the most up to date machinery is used, though hand ironing is still practised on a high percentage of the garments. All round, the atmosphere is healthy — the excessive noise and heat of some more conventional laundries have been eliminated.

Now, the nuns at High Park would like to build a new hostel and a new training centre. They are hoping to divide St. Mary's into smaller apartments so that the girls, who may never know any other home, can have a more comfortable environment.

High Park Convent Building Fund committee are presenting a Fashion Show tonight at 8 p.m. in the Gresham Hotel.

## WITH A DIFFERENCE

By RENAGH HOLOHAN

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