

## EUGENE O'CAHAN

Father Eugene O'Cahan, Franciscan priest and martyr, was born of noble parents in the County Clare at the beginning of the 17th century. At the age of 16, he entered the order of St. Francis of the Strict Observance as one of the brethren in Ennis Convent, and later went to Rome, where he was ordained priest on 12th September, 1622.

At St. Isidore's he studied under Luke Wadding, Anthony Hickey and other famous scholars, and was such a brilliant pupil that he was selected to defend public theses in theology in the years 1634, 1635 and 1639. From 1636 to 1639, he taught philosophy at Boretta in Northern Italy, and, after a short time as Professor of Theology at Pontoise, he returned to Ireland in 1641, and taught here for several years.

In 1644, he kept a public school at Quin, and in 1645, was Guardian of the Friary in Ennis. In 1647, he was Lector of the same Friary and, in the following year, he was transferred to County Limerick where he became Guardian of Askeaton Friary. Of the school at Quin, Father Anthony Broudin, the Franciscan Historian, says:—"Such a crowd of youths from the different provinces of Ireland flocked to that school that, in 1644, it numbered more than 800 students; among them was I with eighteen more of the Broudin family."

While Guardian of the Friary of Askeaton, O Cahan was captured, together with Father William O'Kelly, a learned secular priest, by the Puritans, and Father O'Kelly was instantly hanged. Through the good offices of his friends, O'Cahan was released, but he was again arrested shortly after while journeying on a mission through North Cork, and this time he was strangled without mercy. His cause is now before Rome for recognition of his martyrdom.

## EUGENE O'CURRY

Eugene O'Curry, hod-carrier, asylum-warder, Irish scribe and scholar, and Professor of Irish Archaeology and History in the Royal University of Ireland, was born at Doonaha in the year 1793, son to Owen Mor O'Curry, an itinerant dealer, and Catherine Madigan, of Doonaha, his wife. On his father's death, Eugene wrote of this strange travelling man: "When I call to mind all the knowledge I knew him to possess of every ruin, every old legend and tradition of Thomond, I was suddenly filled with consternation to think it was all gone for ever and no record of it."

However, it was not all lost, for much of it was absorbed by the young Eugene, and it laid the foundation of his later great scholarship—a scholarship which earned him the epithet from

Mathew Arnold "obscure Scaliger of a despised literature." Eugene taught school for four or five years near Doonaha before setting out in 1824 for Limerick, to try his fortune. Here he was employed as a labourer in building the new Thomond Bridge over the Shannon, and later as a warder in the Limerick Lunatic Asylum. He retained the latter post for seven years.

While here his interest in, and love of, old Irish manuscripts and history was discovered, and when Captain Larcom organised his great Irish Survey, O'Curry was employed in George Petrie's department for the elucidation of old Irish place-names, the identification of historical sites, etc., from the early manuscripts. From this time until his death there was hardly a single scholar working, or a single scholarly work written, that did not owe, and acknowledge the great debt they owed, to Eugene O'Curry's immense fund of knowledge or his facility in deciphering abstruse passages in the old manuscripts.

When the survey ceased through lack of funds, O'Curry was for a time idle, but on the foundation of the Royal University, he was given the post of Professor of Irish Archaeology and History. His monumental lectures in this capacity have been published under the titles, *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History*, and *Lectures on the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, the former in one volume in 1861, and the latter in three volumes in 1873.

Cardinal Newman was proud of having appointed O'Curry, who, he said, "would otherwise have carried to the grave with him, unvalued and unused, the keys which might unlock a world of curious and momentous knowledge." But O'Curry was modest, never sought fame for his work, and once wrote of himself: "No person knows my bitter self-deficiencies better than myself. Having been self-taught in all the little I know of general letters, I always felt the want of early mental training and of early admission to those great fountains of knowledge which, though once generally cultivated in my native province, had, under sinister influence, ceased to exist in the remote part of the country from which I came, not very long before I was born."

O'Curry's greatest work was the translation of the Brehon Laws, which were subsequently published without even an acknowledgment of his work on them. He also published, in 1858, for the Celtic Society, *The Battle of Magh Lena*, and, for this Society also, he translated *The Tain Bo*, *The Vision of Adamnan*, *The Origin and History of the Boromean Tribute*. Other translations of his were: *The Book of Invasions*, *The Vision of MacCoinlinne* and *The Festology of Aengus*. In addition to all this work, he transcribed at some time or another most of the ancient Irish manuscripts then in existence, and was responsible for unearthing in the British Museum the most important and long-lost *Tripartite Life of Saint Patrick*.

O'Curry loved his country as much as its history and literature, and resented the English domination of Ireland. At the laying of the foundation stone of the Royal University he refused to stand up and drink the Queen's health, declaring in a loud voice: "My country is my Queen."

He died suddenly on 30th July, 1862, and was buried in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin. There is no monument to this illustrious Irishman's memory in his native county.

## JOHN FRANCIS O'DONNELL

John Francis O'Donnell, poet and journalist, was born in the City of Limerick in 1837. He lived over his father's shop in Gerald Griffin Street, was educated at the Christian Brothers, and joined the staff of the *Munster News* when he seventeen years old.

About this time he began to contribute verse to the *Nation*, and continued to do so until his death. After two years on the *Munster News* he became sub-editor of the *Tipperary Examiner*, and in 1860, joined the *Universal News*, a London paper with Catholic and Irish nationalist views. At this period, he contributed frequently to Charles Dickens' paper, *All the Year Round*, and to *Chamber's Journal*.

In 1862, O'Donnell joined the staff of the *Nation*, and acted as editor of Duffy's *Hibernian Magazine*, but two years saw him again in London, first as editor of his old paper, the *Universal News*, and later as editor of the *Tablet*. In 1873, he obtained a post in the London office of the Agent-General of New Zealand, but he didn't enjoy it long. He died, after a brief illness, on 7th of May, 1874, aged 37, and was buried at Kensal Green, London. In 1891, the Southwark Irish Literary Society published his poems, and had his graves marked with a Celtic Cross.

O'Donnell was so busy as a journalist that he had little time left for pure literary work. His poetry, full of passionate nationalism, was mostly published in the Dublin national journals under the pseudonyms of "Caviare" and "Monkton West," and although it is not known whether or not O'Donnell was a Fenian, it is certain his poetry did much to swell the ranks of that organisation.

Besides the volume of poetry published after his death, he wrote *The Emerald Wreath*, a collection of his prose and verse, which was published as a Christmas Annual in 1865; and *Memories of the Irish Franciscans*, a volume of verse which was published in 1871. D. J. O'Donoghoe, writing in 1906, describes O'Donnell as one of the chief modern poets, and an even more recent critic has described him as the best of the *Nation* poets.