



LIMERICK'S MOST DISTINGUISHED AND ENTHUSIASTIC FRANCOPHILE!

DR. RICHARD HAYES

Sauntering in the twilights of summer evenings about old French towns that knew the footsteps of my countrymen long ago, I often amused myself by trying to call up a dead past when Irish friar or wandering scholar, Irish swordsman, trader or adventurer trod their narrow streets. The visions that in my pleasant folly I used to evoke were, I am sure, fantastic and unreal enough, as any effort to recreate the distant past must so largely be...

For, although a famous chronicler more than ten centuries ago declared that wandering was a second nature to the Irish race, and although missionary zeal, blent with a spirit of adventure, carried its sons through Europe in distant years, later times, too, saw large numbers driven there by alien rule in the great dispersions. Those towns of France-Paris and Nantes, Rouen and Bordeaux-whose relations with Ireland throughout the centuries are here presented, may be taken as typical of many others in that country. Places like Saint Malo and Angers, for example, have equally interesting Irish associations. There were links, too, with scattered towns like Tours and Nancy. As late as the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, Tours had a

little colony of war-worn soldiers of the Irish Brigade, who were spending there the evening of their lives, and round Nancy families of MacMahons, O'Kellys, Warrens and O'Connors are still to be found. Wandering about these places with which they were associated, it was pleasant to recall, and one did so with no little pride, the achievements of my countrymen under the skies where, as soldiers and merchants, missionaries and scholars, they rose to fame and distinction. With a certain poignancy one followed, too, the footsteps of those, broken in fortune, whom tide after tide flung homeless exiles on the coasts of France for their loyalty to country and faith; and of others, their spiritual kin, who sought, alas! so often in vain, for help at foreign courts to deliver their nation from thralldom... they flit to and fro, these Irish exiles whose bones have long been dust in other lands, and many of whose names are forgotten in the country of their forefathers. Yet abroad in many spheres they brought her a fame that is still echoing down the years.

(Old Irish Links with France: Home Echoes of Exiled Ireland by Richard Hayes, 1940)

Richard Hayes and John Devane, house surgeons at the Mater Misericordiæ Hospital, strolled aimlessly from Eccles Street to Grafton Street where they happened to see in the travel agent's window an advertisement for a cheap excursion to Paris. They went there and enjoyed themselves, but for Hayes it was a fateful occasion - he returned a francophile which, combining with a *furor scholasticus*, led to a lifetime's research into Irish links with France.

Devane, less productive in a literary sense, later wrote a history of St. John's Hospital, Limerick; his brother, Dr. James Devane, was the author of *The Isle of Destiny*. John Devane, F.R.C.S.I., had a busy surgical practice in Limerick City, but in 1916 he managed to come to Dublin for Easter and on Easter Sunday he took his fiancée to Lusk, County Dublin, where Dick Hayes was dispensary doctor. They chatted and reminisced. Hayes showed them his garden and gave them tea and in the evening the lovers left him with no inkling that next day as commander of the Fingal Battalion he would be embroiled in the Easter Rebellion.

Richard Hayes soon relinquished his command to Thomas Ashe in order to tend the wounded, friend and foe alike. General Richard Mulcahy has left this description of an unmilitary soldier:

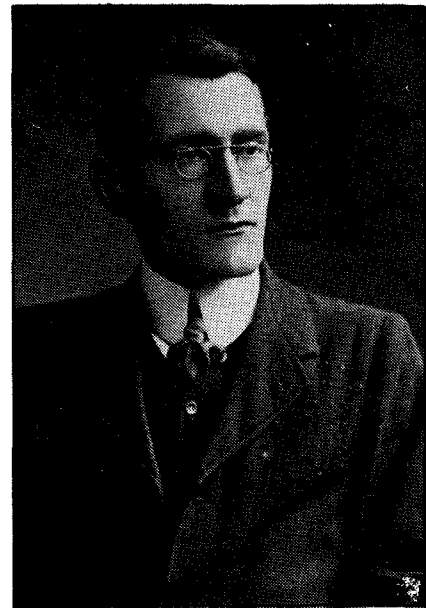
BY J. B. LYONS

In a rushed moment of contact-making in the first lull of the fighting at Rath Cross I met him, erect, alert, absorbed in thought, his revolver aimless in his hand. I broke his thought by a word-"You'll want these" - to give him his satchel of medical supplies picked up some yards away. Later after four hours fighting on a road margined with death and pain and anguish he tended the wounded.

His capital sentence for participation in the battle of Ashbourne was commuted to twenty years penal servitude. He was incarcerated first in Dartmoor, to be transferred to the Isle of Wight some months later and moved in December to Lewes Jail. He was released in a general amnesty in 1917.

When Dr. Hayes was appointed medical officer to Earl Street dispensary, the Local Government Board refused to sanction the appointment and his salary was withheld from 1916 to 1920 when, on the election of a Sinn Féin Board of Guardians, he received what was owing to him. Meanwhile, he was rearrested in 1918 and sent to Reading Jail; while imprisoned there he was elected M.P. for East Limerick.

He also represented Limerick in the Dáil; he participated in the Treaty debate



Richard Hayes.

and voted for it; 'I am voting for the Treaty and I am also supporting its adoption.....' He was it as a compromise, the culmination of a whole series of compromises; he believed that were it not for the oath contained in it ninety-nine per cent of the Dáil would have accepted it as a compromise at least. John O'Leary, the Fenian leader, had said, 'Let England cease to govern Ireland, and I

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shall be true to Ireland, and to the King or Queen of Ireland, even though the Queen or King happen to be the Queen or King of England.' Hayes said, 'If I were convinced this Treaty meant the final reconciliation of Ireland with England I would have very little difficulty in deciding upon which way my vote would go. But it is not the end. The adoption of this Treaty will enable us, as the Chairman of the Delegation said in his opening address, to rebuild here in this country the old Gaelic civilisation that went down at the Battle of Kinsale...'

The political arena had little attraction for him. Just as he had lacked the instincts of a combatant soldier, he had no flair for the cut-and-thrust of parliamentary debate. He seldom spoke in the Dáil, and resigned his seat in 1924 to devote himself to his medical practice and historical scholarship.

A native of Bruree, County Limerick, where he was born in 1882, Richard Francis Hayes was the son of a local school teacher, Richard Hayes, and his wife, Margaret Ruddle. Having obtained secondary schooling in Rathkeale, he became a student of the Catholic University Medical School and took the diplomas Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians in Ireland and Licentiate of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland in 1905. After being house-surgeon at the Mater Hospital, he was resident medical officer in Galway Central Hospital and an external assistant at the Coombe Lying-in Hospital before his appointment as dispensary medical officer in Lusk, from where he moved later to Earl Street Dispensary and finally to Donnybrook Number Two Dispensary. He lived during the tenure of those appointments at Lusk House, Thomond House, South Circular Road and at Guildford Road, Sandymount.

Frank O'Connor, his writer friend, described him as 'a tall, thin man, with a melancholy face, a big nose and a prominent chin that made you think of a punchinello.' He was well-mannered, with an elegant air, and, over a period of years, O'Connor and he strolled for an hour or so most evenings in Sandymount and Ringsend. 'I enjoyed those evening strolls with him,' O'Connor wrote in *My Father's Son*, 'because he raised his hat and bowed low to every poor slum woman he knew, and saluted every man....' Hayes exerted a considerable influence on the younger man and indirectly inspired O'Connor's play about the Irish invincibles and *The Big Fellow*, his biography of Michael Collins, who had been close to Hayes.

Richard Hayes' own first literary compilation, a pamphlet on anatomical terms and names of diseases in Irish, was published in 1905, but the works which earned his fame were the fruit of many years of historical research at home and abroad. When the National University of Ireland awarded him its Historical



Two famous Bruree men: Eamonn de Valera, Chancellor National University of Ireland, at the conferring of an honorary degree on Richard Hayes..

Research Prize in 1934, the *Catholic Bulletin* described him as 'also well known to his friends as a most systematic worker in undeveloped areas of modern Irish history.' The *Bulletin* indicated that the Research Prize usually went to formal academics, 'But it is well, on the other hand, to see a local practitioner in medicine and surgery carry off any principal prize from the privileged group who have a permanent footing in the academic world....'

Frank O'Connor was impressed by Dr. Hayes' clinical ability. His diagnostic perception could sometimes seem uncanny. O'Connor showed him a letter from AE (George Russell) in which the poet said he was ill and that a London doctor had diagnosed colitis. 'I am very sorry to say that is not colitis,' Hayes said, and events were to prove him right. 'That is cancer.'

The demands on his time were irregular and unpredictable. Despite those calls to which priority must be given, he published several books

incorporating original research. It has been said that he was made Film Censor in 1944 to enable him to pursue his avocation more freely, but by then his major works were completed. Besides, as his predecessor James Montgomery said, the job was no 'cinéture'. It entailed viewing two full-length films daily, as well as trailers, re-showings of cut versions and other items.

He was the author of *Ireland and Irishmen in the French Revolution* (1932) which was translated into Irish in 1933; *Irish Swordsmen of France* (1934); *The Last Invasion of Ireland* (1937) and *Old Irish Links with France* (1940).

He also compiled a *Biographical Dictionary of Irishmen in France* and wrote many articles for periodicals such as *Studies* and the *Dublin Magazine*. From the latter, rather than the major works, we get the flavour of the man himself and see him in his leisure moments in some French town, such as Rouen, or idling in Paris on the Left Bank, probably having spent the morning peering at



The Paris boulevards, in the 1920s.

manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale.

Let us follow him as he saunters along the crowded Boulevard St. Michel towards the Luxembourg Gardens, turning into the Rue Corneille and 'passing by the grey hotel where Synge lived during his student days. Further on, his way takes him by 'the dingy lodging where Wilde lived in his days of shadow...' He spends a little time in the silence of the Church of St. Julien le Pauvre: he passes on through narrow streets and an ancient courtyard that reminds him of François Villon.

A few steps leave me on the Quai at the Petit Pont, the great cathedral with its massive towers standing out resplendent in the full sunshine of midday. What memories it calls up of men, and events - Saints and Kings and Emperors, the pomp and splendour of medieval processions full of faith and fervour, of sacrilege and pillage in later days... There to the left is the Tower of the Conciergerie, with its sombre traditions of the Terror - forth from it were led to die Marie Antoinette and Madame Roland, Danton and Charlotte Corday, Robespierre, his broken jaw hanging and dripping blood on his sky-blue coat.' Beside it and of tenderer memories, the slender spire of the Sainte Chapelle sparkles above the Palais de Justice like a jewelled sword.

Attracted inevitably by the book-boxes fixed on the quay-wall, he joins the long line of bookmen and beyond the Pont des Arts finds a volume of Ernest Dowson's poems. 'Combien?' 'Un franc'. Good value at that price!

In Dublin, the vistas are less enchanting, the traditions less splendid

but in St. Stephen's Green 'out of the fine bust among the hawthorns by Oliver Sheppard there gazes the soul of Mangan' and that ill-fated poet reminds Hayes again of Dowson. They shared 'a similar psychosis'. Along the quays, too, there are rich associations for the knowledgeable:

Bayond the wharf you move down the quayside in the shadow of tall houses, gaunt and gray with time, their finely carved doorways telling of faded splendour. There is one, standing apart, with long facade in a high-railed courtyard. Now the haunt of the poor it was in its heyday the city's most exquisitely decorated residence, 'its very windows inlaid with mother of pearl.... Passing by this evening I stop to look at it, and out of the dead years rises a vision of a May night in 1798... its brilliantly-lighted drawing rooms are merry with a festive gathering of the city's youth and fashion. Pamela Fitzgerald is there in all her wan beauty. Pensive and serious tonight, she has put aside her French joyousness.... fears, forebodings cast their shadows about her soul. The lord and master she loves has been risking life and fortune in a gallant adventure... a thousand pounds upon his head.

Richard Hayes' complex character was well summed up by General Richard Mulcahy in *The Irish Sword*, the organ of the Military History Society which Hayes helped to found and of which he was a Vice-President:

Physician, Soldier, Historian, Artist, Philosopher, 'Fire-Sider'. many people of different mould knew Dick Hayes in one or several of these roles. All experienced his gentleness, his reticence; some found

that there were things which drew his flash of anger.

Hayes confided to Frank O'Connor that as a young man he had fallen in love with a girl who had tuberculosis. He knew that she would not live long but he was afraid that if they married and had children the disease would be passed on; unromantically he gave her up. For years he remained a bachelor but in 1939 he married Mrs. Hilda Shaw.

A director of the Abbey Theatre from 1934, Richard Hayes was a member of the Royal Irish Academy and of the Irish Academy of Letters; the National University of Ireland conferred on him the honorary degree Doctor of Letters in 1940, and the French government made him a member of the Legion of Honour.

He did not neglect his native county and maintained his interest in Limerick and its history to the end. His writings reflected this interest, and he contributed two valuable articles to the *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 'The German colony in County Limerick' (1937) and 'Some Notable Limerick Doctors' (1945). He also wrote for other Limerick publications.

When he died at Woodlands, Rochestown Avenue, Dun Laoghaire on 16 June, 1958, Limerick (and Ireland) lost its most distinguished and enthusiastic francophile.

SOURCES

Obituaries in *The Irish Sword* by Richard Mulcahy, W.T. Cosgrave and Charles Petrice, 1958.
My Father's Son by Frank O'Connor, London, 1968.
The North Munster Antiquarian Journal, 1937 and 1945.

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