

The Story of Kilmallock and Kilclooney in 1867

"Who Carried a Fenian Gun"

By

MANNIX JOYCE

THEIR passion was an all-consuming, fierce, unswerving and unselfish love for Ireland. They did not love their motherland because she gave them a scrap of her bogs or fields or mountains but because she was Ireland and had wrongs to be avenged and sorrows to be redressed."

That was Canon Sheehan's fine tribute to the Fenians, the centenary of whose rising out for Irish freedom we celebrate this year of 1967. They deserved so fine a tribute. When we think of the Fenians, we think, perhaps, above all, of the proud manhood of them. There was something extraordinarily fine and manly about them—

*Heads erect, eyes to front, stepping
proudly together,
Sure freedom sits throned on each proud
spirit there.*

Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, Charles Kickham, John O'Mahony, Michael Doheny, James Stephens, John O'Leary, John Boyle O'Reilly, Peter O'Neill

Crowley, they all "kept faith with the past and handed on a tradition to the future." Pádraig Pearse, the noblest inheritor of that tradition, could say as he stood at Rossa's grave on 1 August, 1915:

"... The seeds sown by the young men of '65 and '67 are coming to their miraculous ripening to-day. Rulers and defenders of realms had need to be wary if they would guard against such processes. Life springs from death, and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations. The defenders of this realm have worked well in secret and in the open. They think they have pacified Ireland. They think they have purchased half of us and intimidated the other half. They think they have foreseen everything; think they have provided against everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools! they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace."

There are Fenian graves in a churchyard that is not three miles from where I am writing this article; even now, as I look

out of the window, I can see on a low ridge, some four hundred yards away, the carpenter's workshop that was an arms depot in 1867. There was great activity on the road outside that workshop on the night of Shrove Tuesday, 5 March, 1867. Pikes were being distributed to the local Fenians who were about to take part in the attack on Kilmallock police barracks, an attack that is still well remembered in story and song:

*I was down then in Kilmallock—
'Twas the hottest fight of all—
And you see—he bared his arm—
There's the mark still of a ball.
I hope the young lads growing now
Will hold the ground we won,
And not disgrace the cause in which
I held that Fenian gun.¹*

We have inherited a strong Fenian tradition in my part of County Limerick. Far back as I can remember, I have listened to stories of the fights at Kilmallock and Kilclooney, and have heard songs and ballads about the Unknown Fenian and about O'Neill Crowley. I can even recall having seen a very old man who was one of the Fenians who fought at Kilmallock in '67.

But before going on to tell of our local Fenian men and their activities, a few words about the Fenian movement in general may not be out of place, for what happened at Kilmallock and Kilclooney, at Kiltely and Ardagh was only part of the story of the Fenian Rising, and the part becomes intelligible only in the context of the whole. Who were the Fenians? Looking back across the space of a hundred years, and mindful of the course of Irish history and Irish sympathies since then, we may not be prepared to quarrel with the view that:

"They were the descendants and the true spiritual brothers of the men who stood guard around the Mass Rocks of

Ireland when the Faith was banned. . . . They were the descendants of the Irish soldiers of Aughrim, of Limerick, of Kinsale, of Benburb, of every battlefield where the undefeated cause of Ireland rallied faithful men and brave men and fearless men to the standard of honour and freedom. They were the sons of all the unpaid fighters of the centuries and generations who clung to the Faith of Patrick and the cause of Ireland. . . ."

Tracing the unbroken line of the Separatist tradition in his famous pamphlet, *Ghosts*, Pearse said: "Three Young Irishmen were the founders of Fenianism." The three were James Stephens, John O'Mahony and Michael Doheny. Exiled from Ireland since the failure of the '48 Rising, they laid the plans of their new movement in the United States. The year was 1858.

It was John O'Mahony who proposed that the members of the new movement should be known as Fenians, after the doughty Fianna of Fionn mac Cumhaill, with whose feats O'Mahony was familiar through his knowledge of the old literature of the *Fiannaíocht*. O'Mahony, who had in him something of the qualities of an ancient Irish chief, was a gentleman farmer who hailed from the Kilbehenny district in south-east Limerick, his lands forming part of the former possessions of the O'Mahony's which had been confiscated to the Kingstons. Educated at Cork and Trinity College, he was a good Greek, Latin and Irish scholar. He translated Keating's celebrated *History of Ireland—Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*—into English.

In 1848 he was with Smith O'Brien at Ballinacorney, and afterwards escaped to the United States via France. During the American Civil War he was Colonel of the Ninety-ninth New York Volunteers. Subsequently, he became Chief Executive or Head Centre of the Fenian Brotherhood. He died in poverty in New York in February 1877, after a lifetime of service to

Ireland. In passing, it might be remarked that it was John O'Mahony's native parish that produced Liam Lynch and Donncha Ó hAnnagáin, two of the ablest and most courageous of the leaders in the southern area of operations during the Irish War of Independence.

Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa and some friends of his had, in fact, anticipated the coming of Fenianism when they founded the Phoenix Club in Skibbereen in 1856. Ostensibly a literary society, it was secretly directed towards the fostering of revolutionary ideals.³ In due course Phoenix Clubs spread over Cork and Kerry. Fenianism in Ireland could be said to have grown out of these Phoenix Clubs—and, perhaps, to a certain extent out of the branches of the National Brotherhood of Saint Patrick.

The Irish Republican Brotherhood—soon to be abbreviated to I.R.B.—was the official name of the Irish section of the Fenian movement, which was launched in Dublin on Saint Patrick's Day, 1858. But in Ireland, as in the United States, members took to calling themselves Fenians, a name that seemed to strike a responsive chord in the racial consciousness. The centre of the I.R.B. continued to remain in the United States, where the movement was supported by the great Irish-American organisation, the *Clan na Gael*. James Stephens was entrusted with the task of organising the Fenians in Ireland and preparing a Rising there, the object of which would be the establishment of an Irish Republic. Among his first colleagues was Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, the leading light of the Skibbereen Phoenix Club.

Members of the I.R.B. took an oath of allegiance to the Irish Republic, and

"As a secret, oath-bound society, the I.R.B. was denounced by the Catholic Church, but the unhappy people adhered to Fenianism as their last hope. Great numbers enrolled; the American armies

of the Civil War contained thousands of Irishmen whose experience was to be used in training young men at home; Irishmen serving with the British Forces took the secret Fenian oath. English agents, however, were at the same time enrolling secretly in the Fenian ranks."⁴

The text of the Fenian oath was as follows:

"I, A. B. in the presence of Almighty God, do solemnly swear allegiance to the Irish Republic, now virtually established, and that I will do my very utmost, at every risk, while life lasts, to defend its independence and integrity; and, finally, that I will yield implicit obedience in all things not contrary to the laws of God, to the commands of my superior officers."⁵

In so much as it was a secret, oath-bound society,—though, unlike such societies, the names of its leaders were known to the rank and file—Archbishop—later Cardinal—Cullen and the Roman Curia found implied condemnation of Fenianism in the *Syllabus of Errors* of 1864. At the instigation of the British Government, with the willing co-operation of the Irish hierarchy, came the Papal Decree of 1870 against Fenianism.⁶

Archbishop Cullen, who had spent many years in Italy, seemed obsessed with a dread of the Carbonari, whose evil hand he could see even in Irish affairs.⁷ He was completely reactionary in his political views. He opposed every popular movement most consistently.⁸ Even to so innocuous an organisation as Gavan Duffy's Irish Tenant-Right League he was bitterly hostile; and against practically all public opinion in Ireland he continued to support Sadlier and Keogh after that pair had shamelessly sold out on their countrymen.

Viewed from the vantage point of the *Aggiornamento* age, the attitude of Church to state and of church to Irish national movements and Irish aspirations in the

Ireland of the 1860's can be at times a little difficult to comprehend. For with the campaign for the disestablishment of the Protestant Church, that is for the severance of the connection between Church and State "The Irish bishops . . . flew in the face of the *Syllabus of Errors* in a campaign to attain that which the Papacy most dreaded: a 'free church in a free state'."⁹ In 1868, "at the height of the Irish Church crisis, Cardinal Antonelli, Papal Secretary of State, told Odo Russell (unofficial representative of the British Government at the Holy See) that the Vatican 'could never approve or sanction the principle of the disendowment of any church—or the principle of the separation of church and state in any country'."¹⁰

In County Mayo, Father Patrick Lavelle, the parish priest of Partry, was vice-president of Saint Patrick's Brotherhood and plainly sympathetic to Fenian objectives. But he was protected from censure by the patronage of Archbishop John MacHale of Tuam.¹¹

And some thirteen years after the Fenian Rising, the great Doctor Croke, Archbishop of Cashel, could say of Charles Kickham, the gentle author of *Knocknagov* and *Sally Cavanagh*, and one of the leaders of the Fenian organisation:

"I take him to be of all men that I have ever met about the gentlest, the most amiable, the most truthful, and the most sorely and searchingly tried; at the same time I believe our Holy Mother the Church has few more dutiful sons than he, and none more thoroughly devoted to her interests, or more resolutely and reasonably faithful."¹²

With the memory of the political helplessness of the decade succeeding the Great Famine still so painfully fresh in their minds, with bitter memories, too, of the treachery of Sadlier and Keogh and other of the parliamentarians, it is hardly to be

wondered at that the people began to turn towards men like Charles Kickham and towards the doctrine of physical force they preached. In Tone's formula of complete separation from England they saw the only cure for Ireland's many ills.

"Assuming that an Irish republic was formed with the enrolment of the first members, in the Fenian oath allegiance was sworn to the new republic, which necessarily meant a repudiation of English power. Nor was there any difficulty in finding thousands who were ready to take such an oath. Irish landlordism and English law, as administered in Ireland, had planted beyond the Atlantic a new Irish nation more fiercely opposed to England than even the old green island at home. Amid the rush and bustle of American cities, on American farms and railroads, in the lonely log-cabin in American woods, down in the depths of American mines were Irish exiles who thought of England only with a curse. Their fathers had told them of the horrors of the famine days, and they themselves had seen the crowbar brigade at work, the house levelled in which they were born, the fire quenched round which they had gathered to pray at their mother's knee. They had known English law only by its oppressions, and Government only as an instrument of terror. Irish landlordism and English rule they had always seen linked together in injustice, and, as they thought of them, the light of battle was in their eye."¹³

When the American Civil War ended in 1865, some 200,000 Irish-American soldiers were set free to fight for Irish freedom. The Fenian movement slowly spread through the length and breadth of Ireland. In November 1861, the funeral of Terence Bellew MacManus, a '48 man who had died in exile in San Francisco, and whose remains were brought home for interment, was made the occasion of a great national demonstration in Dublin. Tens of thousands of young men from all parts of

And having gathered them safely round the nursery fire the old nurse would tell them about a terrible night in March, and

*An army of Papists grim,
With a green flag o'er them,
Red-coats and black police
Flying before them.*

*But God (Who our nurse declared
Guards British dominions)
Sent a deep fall of snow
And scattered the Fenians.*

Four little people, when they were in bed, and heard the wind rattle the window pane, would cry: "Oh! tuck us in, the Fenians are coming!"

*But one little rebel there,
Watching all with laughter,
Thought "When the Fenians come
I'll rise and go after".*

*Wished she had been a boy
And a good deal older—
Able to walk for miles
With a gun on her shoulder.*

*Able to lift aloft
That Green Flag o'er them
(Red-coats and black police
Flying before them).*

*And, as she dropped asleep,
Was wondering whether
God, if they prayed to Him,
Would give fine weather.*

More than anything else, it was the great snowstorm of March 1867 that kept the Fenian Rising from becoming what might well have been a sweeping flame of insurrection; as it was, it merely spluttered and died out. The snowstorm began on 6 March, and "For twelve days and nights without intermission a tempest of snow and sleet raged over the land, piling snow

to the depth of yards on all mountains, streets and highways".¹⁶ But, despite everything, the Fenians rose and fought in many districts, attacking the military and police in such places as Tallaght, Ballyknockane, Midleton, Castlemartyr, Ballyhurst, Stepaside, Glencullen and Kilmallock.

The fight at Kilmallock was one of the most determined of the Rising. During the trial of the Fenians who had taken part in it, the Attorney General referred to the Kilmallock fight as "this outbreak, which was the most obstinately conducted of all these engagements, the most wickedly persevered in, and the most seriously planned."¹⁷ The Fenians were very strong in the district.

About 1860, a branch of the National Brotherhood of Saint Patrick was established in Kilmallock. It was supposed to be a kind of literary society. The Brotherhood, about which very little appears to be known, was founded by a Baptist minister named Bell, who had been a member of Gavan Duffy's Tenant-Right movement. There were some fifty members in the Kilmallock branch, and it was not long before the police began to take considerable interest in it. This was not altogether surprising, for the vast majority of the members of the branch had begun to merge themselves with the physical force movement, a fact that caused the more timid members to resign.

William Henry O'Sullivan, who kept a hotel, shop and public car establishment in Kilmallock, was a staunch friend of the Fenians, and his premises became a rendezvous for the Fenian leaders. Very many of his forty employees were active Fenians. Meetings were also held from time to time in Condon's public house. Patrick Walsh, a farmer's son from the district, who was employed as a shop assistant in O'Sullivan's, was the most able organiser in the district; he travelled as a Fenian emissary to America in 1865. Daniel Bradley, a Corkman, who was employed

in Grant's drapery establishment, was another very able organiser. As part of their plans, the Kilmallock Fenians established an arms depot at Dick Walsh's workshop in Tankardstown, in the western part of the parish; and that is the workshop I have already mentioned as being visible to me from where I now sit writing this article. In this part of the parish the Fenian leader was Richard Bermingham.

In the spring of 1866, Stephen Barry Walsh, secretary of the Kilmallock branch of the National Brotherhood of Saint Patrick, and a prominent Fenian, was arrested. Nicholas Gaffney, another prominent local Fenian, the grandson of a United Irishman, having heard about Walsh's arrest, and having good reason to believe that he was next on the list, immediately left home and travelled to Knocklong, from where he took a train to Dublin.

Afterwards he made his way to the United States, *via* Glasgow, and was one of a group of American Fenians who, intending to follow in the footsteps of Colonel John O'Neill, set out to make war on Canada. American troops, however, prevented them from crossing the border.

The local "centre" or leader for the Kilmallock district was Willie Wall, a teacher in Kilmallock workhouse. He was deported in 1865. As he was leaving Kilmallock railway station, escorted by police, he handed his sister Ellen a slip of paper on which he had written a poem of farewell. The surviving version of the poem has the appearance of having been beaten a little out of shape in the course of the hundred years or more since it was written; but still I think it merits inclusion in this pot-pourri of memories of our local Fenians:



Young Dick Walsh of Tankardstown stands beside the building that served as an arms' depôt for his great-grandfather, Dick Walsh.

WILLIE WALL'S FAREWELL

Farewell to dear old Ireland,
For America I am bound;
In this isle for another while
No place for me is found.
And though I must roam far away from
home,

Across the stormy sea,
I have hopes in store I'll return home
Once more to help this isle to free.

So now with a sigh I must bid you all
good-bye,
And make no more delay;
The ship's sails are spread before the
gale,

No longer can I stay.

I thought before this in the battlefield
For my country I could stand,
But now instead I must earn my bread
Far away from my own dear land.
And who've I to blame but the man I
won't name,
Who would not give us the word,
Our country to free from Saxon tyranny,
With the rifle, pike and sword.

So now with a sigh, etc.

Under the sun there's not another one
To equal our own green isle—
Can you tell me the reason so many of her
sons
Are living in exile?
I will tell you the cause: 'Tis the Saxons'
laws

That won't give them room to live;
But I hope the day is not far away
When this room to us they must give.

So now with a sigh, etc.

It makes me lonesome to think of the past,
And of my childhood days,
When at the cross after coming home from
Mass,

We used to meet and join in our play.
But all of those young friends are gone,
And are scattered all over the earth;
In grief and woe they were forced to go
From the land that gave them birth.

So now with a sigh, etc.

Ó Éire, mo chroí, must we always be
Exiles all over the earth,
To return no more to you, a stór,
The land that gave us birth.
Oh, no! oh, no! 'Tis a burning shame,
And this cruel thing will not be,
For we'll come back in ships with vengeance
on our lips
From the wilds of America!

So now with a sigh, etc.

Willie Wall never saw his native land again. He died in Dakota, and is described on his headstone as "William Wall, Kilmallock". The reference in the second stanza of his poem to the man whose name he would not give is obviously a reference to James Stephens, whom many of the Fenians blamed for not giving the word to rise in 1865.

When, eventually, a Rising was decided on, the date fixed for it was the night of March 5/6, 1867. By this time, Colonel Thomas Kelly had replaced James Stephens as supreme commander of the Fenians in Ireland. Irish-American officers had arrived in many districts to lead the local men. One of these officers, Captain John Dunne, a former native of Ráthluirc, had assumed command of the districts of Kilmallock, Charleville (now Ráthluirc) and Bruff, and had as his first main objective the capture of Kilmallock police barracks, a building considered to be well nigh impregnable. The plan of action for the Fenians under Dunne's command was that they would assemble in bodies in different areas, and would mass themselves together by degrees, increasing their strength



The Kilmallock police barracks in 1867.

as they went, taking arms, attacking the smaller outlying police barracks, cutting telegraph wires, pulling up railway lines, and generally destroying communications. Many of these duties, especially the assaults on the outlying police barracks, were found impossible to carry out.

The Brucee Fenians met on top of the local railway bridge at about 8 o'clock on Tuesday night 5 March, and Patrick Ward distributed pikes among them. Patrick Ward, incidentally, lived only a few hundred yards from the house to which, eighteen years later, the child Éamon de Valera would come from the United States to be reared by his grandmother and his uncle, Pat Coll. Having been thus armed, the Brucee Fenians, with Richard Bermingham of Tankardstown at their head, marched eastwards in the direction of Kilmallock. A sister of one of the men marched with them; and so did Alice

Harris. They carried a supply of bread for the fighting men.

At Ballygibba cross-roads they turned right, and a few minutes later arrived outside Dick Walsh's workshop at Tankardstown. There were more Fenians here, and pikes were brought out of the workshop and distributed among them. All then set off together, and marched by a round-about way to Gabbett's Field, near Kilmallock railway station, which was the appointed meeting place for all the Fenians taking part in the barrack attack. And the word went round the field that all Ireland was rising that night, and that at last the English would be driven out and the country would be free. Hope ran high. In due course Captain Dunne arrived and took supreme command.

At five o'clock on the morning of Ash Wednesday, 6 March, the lights went out in the police barracks in Kilmallock, and

the order to advance was given. Falling in, four deep, the Fenians set out for the fight. They were led by Captain Dunne, Daniel Bradley, Patrick Walsh, Patrick Riordan (the driver), and William O'Sullivan, son of the proprietor of the hotel.¹⁸ When they reached the building and viewed its solid strength they must have realised the magnitude of their task. The barracks was a regular fortress, and for the storming of it the Fenians had brought a few guns, some scores of long-handled pikes—and an unlimited supply of courage.

Inside the barracks were a score of well-armed, well-trained policemen. One of the Fenians advanced to the door of the barracks and attempted to set it on fire with hay and paraffin. The alarm was raised. The Fenians dashed to the cover of the wall in front of the building and opened fire. The police replied with vigour. Attempts to blow up the barracks dragged on for too long and had to be abandoned. Hour after hour the fight continued; and again and again the attackers attempted to burn the barricaded door in order to force an entrance. All attempts failed. Daylight was coming, bringing with it the added dangers of recognition by the police.

The turning point in the fight came with the arrival of reinforcements for the police from Kilfinane under Inspector Milling. A withering crossfire was opened on the Fenians. It was now about half past ten in the morning, and people working in the fields and farm yards in the district, hearing the sounds of the firing, wondered what was happening. But there were many who knew what the firing meant, and they breathed a prayer for the men who had risen in arms and challenged English rule in Ireland.

The arrival of the police reinforcements from Kilfinane left the Fenians with no choice but to withdraw. Three men had died in the fight. Doctor Clery, a Fenian, who wasn't participating directly in the fight, exposed himself in the street and was

shot dead by a police bullet. At great personal risk, Father Corrigan, C.C., arrived and administered the Last Rites. One of the Brucee Fenians, a shoemaker named Daniel Blake, was killed in action, as was also a second of the attackers, whose identity was never established, and who has been remembered ever since as the Unknown Fenian. Michael Hogan, the Bard of Thomond, wrote a poem about him:—

*Who was he at Kilmallock, that brave-
hearted stranger,*

*Who daringly breasted the fire of the foe?
Like a veteran inured to the battle's grim
danger,*

*He fought till the red hail of death laid him
low.*

*Nameless he fell on the frozen sward dying,
No kind heart to soothe him or bear him
away;*

*The dreary March wind his sad litany
sighing,
His death couch and pillow the blood-
moistened clay.*

*When the brave few who struck for the old
land retreated,
Outnumbered—not routed, betrayed—not
defeated,
Their gallant young comrade who fought
so elated,
Poured out his heart's blood where behind
them he lay.*

*When gory and cold by the wayside they
found him,
Beneath the bleak freezing sky, lifeless and
lone,
He wore the loved badge of the Virgin
around him,
But the name of the patriot to all was
unknown.*

*Was he one of those whom our flunkeys
so loyal
With the foul name "assassin" so
shamefully banned,*

*Whose faithful young bosoms but longed
for the trial
To shed their dear blood for their suffering
land?*

*But prouder your fate, gallant lover of Erin,
To fall for your country her native green
wearing,
Than bear the high name some traitors
are bearing,
With the gold of the spoiler polluting your
hand.*

*When a warrior falls midst his people
victorious,
With the foe of his country laid round him
in dust,
The emblems of victory exalted and glorious
Encircle his statue and hallow his bust.*

*But for you, son of freedom, your fall
was as noble,*

*You died for the land which your heart
longed to save;
No more will her sorrows your young
spirit trouble,
Nor tyrant disturb the calm peace of your
grave.*

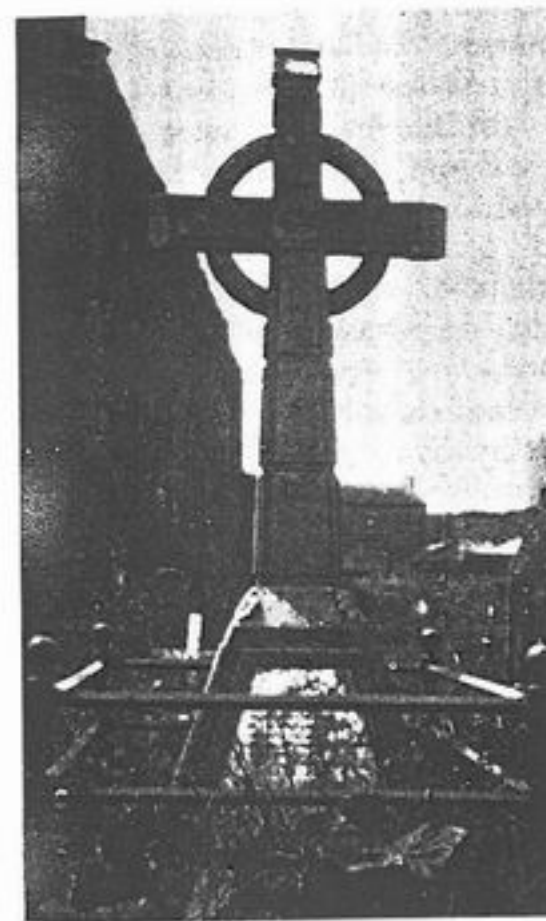
*Yet sincerely the sweet beams of heaven
now glow there,
And greenly the fresh dewy shamrocks
grow there,
And lovers of freedom in future will go there
To bless the repose of the youthful and brave.*

The Unknown Fenian, who was described by Inspector Milling as "not a bad soldier at all"¹⁹, was buried in Kilmallock churchyard; and on the stone above his grave these lines are carved:

*Here lies one who loved his country well,
And in her sacred cause untimely fell;
Let every honest heart who reads this scroll,
Pray God save Ireland and his immortal soul.*

There is a very strong tradition in the Kilmallock district that the Unknown Fenian was, in fact, a young man named James Hassett, whose father kept a public house in Bulgaden, a couple of miles east of Kilmallock. James Hassett's father had an uncle living near Castleconnell, and about twenty-five years ago a son of this uncle, a man who signed himself T. Bagot, wrote a letter to the *Limerick Leader* (I have seen a copy of the letter) about the Unknown Fenian. T. Bagot told how a day or two after the Kilmallock fight his father had a visit from James Hassett's father, who was enquiring if they knew anything about the whereabouts of his son who had been missing since the night of March 5.

On that night he had retired to his room as if to go to bed, but in the morning when his sister went to call him there was no trace of him, nor had the bed been slept on. The father remembered having heard a whistle outside the house sometime during the night. He had heard a similar whistle



Grave of the Unknown Fenian in Kilmallock

on a few occasions previously. He doubted very much that his son had emigrated. Anyway, James Hassett was never heard of again. Perhaps then it is he who sleeps in the Unknown Fenian's grave in Kilmallock.

According to local belief, Hassett senior was not prepared to go to the police to discover if the unidentified dead man was his son, for if the dead man was not his son, he would, by his going to the police, have led the authorities to believe that his son had participated in the attack. It is also thought that the matter of his publican's licence may have kept Mr. Hassett from going to the police, as public house licences could be taken away from publicans whose family had any connection with the Fenian movement. William Costelloe of Rathkeale lost his licence because his son, Captain Thomas Meagher Costelloe, was one of the Irish-American officers who returned to Ireland for the Rising.

For those who had taken part in the Rising at Kilmallock the prospect was grim indeed. Death or long terms of imprisonment or years of banishment in some penal settlement stared them in the face. Some went straight to Cobh and escaped to America. Captain Dunne was one of those who got away. So was Richard Bermingham.

A man who had been wounded in the fight was being nursed at home, with a policeman continually on guard to see that he did not get away. The wounded man's bed was in a room off the kitchen, and the door leading thereto was kept open so that the policeman who sat in the kitchen could keep the bedroom under observation. The Fenian had a very good-looking sister, who succeeded in giving the policeman who did guard duty in the evenings the impression that she was falling in love with him. One evening she managed to lure him away for a walk. Immediately, her brother jumped out of bed, dressed and left the house, and a dummy figure was substituted for him in the bed. He got away, hidden in a load

of straw.

But others stayed behind, and these were quickly arrested. A Special Commission was set up to try them; and on 6 May, 1867, the County Grand Jury handed down true bills for high treason against twenty-five of them. The indictment of the prisoners read:

"The jurors for our Lady, the Queen, upon their oath do say and present that Patrick Walsh, Daniel Bradley, Patrick Riordan, otherwise known as Patrick Riordan the driver, William O'Sullivan, Maurice Fitzgibbon, Denis Hennessy, Christopher Hawthorne, Michael Riordan, Michael Foley, John Sheehan, Michael Noonan, Patrick Ward, Patrick Riordan, otherwise Patrick Riordan the smith, William Turner, Robert Cantillon, John MacCarthy, Thomas Aherne, Patrick Maguire, Patrick Pigott, Thomas Daly, Thomas O'Donnell, Patrick Barrett, Thomas Meehan, Denis Connors, John Walsh, not regarding the duty of their allegiance nor having the fear of God in their hearts, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the Devil, as false traitors against our said Lady, the Queen, and wholly withdrawn their allegiance from our Lady, the Queen, on the fifth day of March, in the year of Our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-seven, and on divers other days between that day and the first day of March aforesaid, to wit, at Kilmallock, in the County of Limerick, aforesaid, together with divers other false traitors to the jury aforesaid unknown, arm in warlike manner, that is to say with guns, muskets, pistols, swords, bayonets, pikes, and other weapons, being then unlawfully, maliciously and traitorously assembled and called together against our said Lady, the Queen, most wickedly, maliciously and traitorously, make open war against our said Lady, the Queen . . ."

In addition to those listed in the indictment, the verbatim reports of the trials and the press reports mention the following persons who were actively engaged in the Kilmallock attack: William Somers, James Lyons, J. Bolton, Batt Raleigh, Ned Raleigh, John Maguire, J. Joyce, John Dixon, Daniel Murphy, Con Murphy, John Cashen.²⁰

Ned Raleigh was the maternal grandfather of the late Seán Moylan, former Minister of State, and a man who played a heroic part in North Cork during the War of Independence. Both Ned Raleigh and his brother Batt were employed as shoemakers in Kilmallock Workhouse. Batt Raleigh was one of the most active workers in the Fenian movement in Kilmallock, and travelled many a weary mile, on foot or on horseback, making the necessary contacts for the Rising. After the Kilmallock fight he found shelter for a time in Tankardstown, then went on to Mitchelstown, and finally to Aherlow, the retreat of the hunted in all periods of our history. He lived to see the I.R.A. destroy the Kilmallock barracks. Pat Rawley was a grand-uncle of the late Seán Moylan, who played so heroic a part in north Cork during the War of Independence.

And who, one might ask, were the members of the Grand Jury who charged the Fenians in that quaintly-worded indictment? They were men who bore names like Massey, Croker, Ellis, Cooper Cooper, Fosberry, Maunsell, Blennerhasset, Howley, men of alien stock and tradition, whose ascendancy had been achieved in the downfall of the Gael. The contrast between the two sets of names would, in itself, almost justify the Fenians and their cause.

For his part in the attack on the Kilmallock police barrack Patrick Walsh was sentenced to fifteen years penal servitude. He was the man who, when wounded in the fight, said: "Never mind, Ireland will be free to-night". Daniel Bradley was sentenced to ten years; Patrick Riordan, the

driver, Denis Hennessy, John Sheehan, each to seven years; and William O'Sullivan, Thomas Daly, Maurice Fitzgibbon, Michael Noonan, each to five years. Others received lesser sentences.

The man who sentenced the Kilmallock Fenians was the notorious Judge Keogh, the former Tenant Leaguer who, with Sadlier, had shamelessly sold out his countrymen a few years previously.

The William O'Sullivan who was sentenced to five years, was the seventeen-year-old son of the already-mentioned William Henry O'Sullivan, hotel keeper. William Henry O'Sullivan had been arrested a few hours before the attack on the barracks, but no specific charge could be brought against him. When his son was being tried Judge Keogh described the father as "the fount and focus of Fenianism" for all the Kilmallock district.

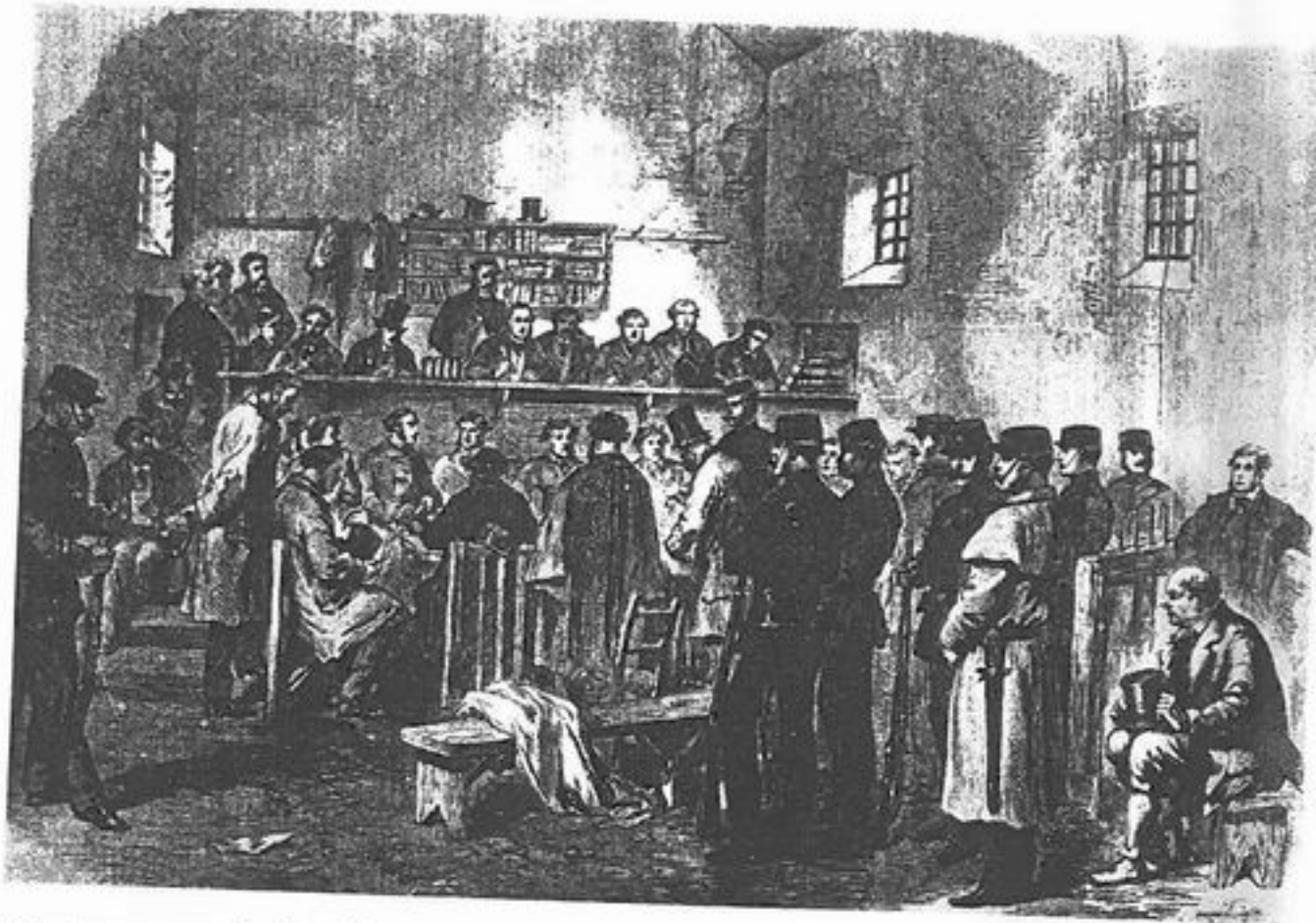
In the course of his brief address to the court Patrick Walsh said:

"My lords and gentlemen of the jury, I am quite satisfied to abide my sentence and have few remarks to make . . . it has been said that I was in America. I was there certainly. My country, I believe, demanded all the assistance I could give. . . . But I would be ready and willing to serve my country at any moment, if I could do her any good."²¹

Daniel Bradley spoke even more briefly:

"I am satisfied to abide the result. I am sure I did right when I took up arms for the Irish Republic."²²

Young Tom Pat Clery, who lived a few miles outside Kilmallock, was, like his brothers, a dedicated Fenian. On the night before the Kilmallock attack, his parents, obviously sensing something was afoot, locked him into his room. But Tom Pat was determined to be with his comrades, and he kicked his way to freedom



Contemporary sketch of the inquest on Doctor Michael Clery in the Courthouse in Kilmallock

through the room door, and took part in the fight, in which his brother, Doctor Michael Clery, was to lose his life.

After the Kilmallock attack, Tom Pat made his way to the Foynes district, from where he took ship to the United States. Years afterwards, he returned home. A relative of his, to whom I was speaking shortly after the Fenian centenary celebrations in Kilmallock, told me he remembered him as a very old man, with a "troublesome" toe which required occasional medical attention. Tom Pat used to refer jokingly to this toe as his "Fenian toe", for it had never been the same since the night he kicked his way through his bedroom door in order to join the Fenians in the fight at Kilmallock!

Patrick Walsh was released at the general amnesty in 1871, but was forbidden to return to Ireland. He came back seriously ill in 1875—despite the ban. Arrested again in July of that year, he was sentenced to

six years, the unexpired part of his sentence. Nobody that I have consulted knows where he is buried.

Daniel Bradley died while a ticket-of-leave man, and his bones lie in far-off Freemantle.

When Patrick Riordan came out of prison he was completely broken in health, and died shortly afterwards. He was buried in Kilmallock churchyard, close to the Unknown Fenian, and a monument erected above his grave in 1911 was unveiled by Seán Mac Diarmada, one of the young generation who had been rebaptised in the Fenian faith, and who would die for that faith five years later before a firing squad in Kilmainham Jail.

One of the finest of the characters who took part in the Kilmallock barrack attack was a man named Edmond Houlihan, of Darnstown, Kilmallock. He lost his sight in the fight, and afterwards, as a wandering musician, tramped the roads of central

Ireland, with a twofold purpose in mind: to earn a few pennies to keep body and soul together, and to keep alive the spirit of Fenianism. In the *Offaly Independent* of 10 January, 1953, "P.F." (the late Patrick Fanning, Ferbane) paid a noble tribute to this fine old Limerick Fenian, who died in his native Darnstown at the age of ninety-two, on 27 December, 1931.

"It is exactly 21 years ago," wrote "P.F.", "since Edmond Houlihan died on the 27th of December, 1931, in his native Darnstown, Kilmallock, where he was born in the year of the Big Wind, 1839. For over fifty years he had traversed the roads of Ireland singing rebel songs and playing old Irish melodies on his violin. They are, indeed, numerous all over the Midlands who remember 'Rambling Jack', as he was popularly known. His arrival twice a year in all the local villages and towns was quite sufficient to set the heather blazing. His tall, erect, athletic figure, even in extreme old age, was an arresting one. He was one of the last of the Fenian Brotherhood, and he was in the true tradition of the old Irish bards and wandering minstrels, who used to be so highly honoured in the Ireland of long ago.

"He was a fluent Irish speaker, and it was a treat to hear him either in conversation or in song. He appeared more than once on the platform at the County Feis in Tullamore; and there was one notable occasion when he appeared with the present Earl of Longford. He was a splendid singer, and his rich baritone voice was truly music to the ear, as he sang of Irish heroes and heroic Irish deeds. His repertoire of Irish tunes, and Irish and Anglo-Irish songs seemed unlimited. True to the ideals of his youth, 'Rambling Jack' refused steadfastly to sing unworthily. On one occasion, in Ferbane, he was asked to sing 'Master MacGrath', and he replied gravely, 'No, no, sir. I only sing of Irishmen. I never sing of dogs.' He was absolutely fearless, as he proved on another occasion in the same

town, when he sang 'Patrick Sheehan' as a recruiting meeting was about to begin.

"The Limerick countryside from which he came is one rich in balladry . . . With 'Rambling Jack' the singing of ballads was an art, and an enchanting one at that. Who that ever heard him can forget him at the 'Smashing of the Van'?

"But he was equally glorious in 'Michael Dwyer', 'The Green above the Red', 'O'Donovan Rossa', 'My Father's Fenian Gun', 'Peter O'Neill Crowley', 'Pat O'Donnell', 'The Bold Fenian Men' and a host of others in both Irish and English.

". . . for a long half century, poor Houlihan sang and played through the towns and villages of Ireland, and for a man who could not see to read he was remarkably well informed, and knew everything that was going on. He knew everybody in every town by voice, and it was rarely he forgot a name. He performed some remarkable feats, one of the most remarkable being to play his way across the country in 1915, in order to attend the funeral of his old chief, Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa. He heard Pearse's immortal graveside oration, and often quoted from it. And sad to relate, it was in a Westmeath village, in the early days of the 'Great War to end Wars', in 1915 or 1916, that exception was taken to some of his rebel songs, and some West Britons took and smashed his violin. This incident is immortalised in a famous Irish novel by a still more famous living Irish novelist."

"P.F.", in his article in the *Offaly Independent*, went on to tell how the grand old rebel's call home came. On a brown October day he failed on the road between Birr and Banagher. He was taken to Tullamore County Hospital; but though partly restored to health, his days on the road were over. "Never again would the Irish roads see his manly, athletic figure, with the blackthorn stick in one hand, and the other behind his back with a large brown Rosary beads slipping through his

aged fingers." He expressed a wish to return to his native Limerick; and kind friends saw to it that his wish was granted. "It was characteristic of him," wrote "P.F.," "that in going to Limerick he insisted on travelling alone. He maintained the manly independence of the Fenian to the end. Two years after he had returned home, he died at the age of 92.

"Rambling Jack," went on "P.F.," "was more than a ballad singer. He was in the true tradition of Ireland's traditional bards. The fiddle, which before the Kilmallock accident, had been his amusement, became for him afterwards, through more than fifty years, an instrument in the cause of Irish independence. When he could no longer use the sword, no power on earth could prevent him using his powerful baritone voice. No man did more than he, in a humble way, to preserve the soul of Ireland through a decadent period in Irish history. Nothing could deflect him from the course that he pursued. It was his life's work, and he bore the heat and the burden of the day, was better known in jail than out of it. He possessed the instinct of the blind to an extraordinary degree, and coupled with it the passion of the patriot. He spoke little, but when he did his vibrant voice gripped one. He was a man apart with a singleness of purpose that made him one of the real pioneers in the cause of Irish nationhood. He was one of the regenerations of the race, and often in the years that have passed since his death we have heard tributes paid his patriotic memory in many villages and towns from Camblin to the slopes of Slievenamon. . .

"All that was mortal of 'Rambling Jack' was laid to rest in the gloom of a winter's day in Kilbreedy cemetery (a few miles east of Kilmallock), just twenty-one years ago. And here we leave him. May his spirit be at rest, and may the Limerick sod rest lightly on one of the truest and sincerest of Irish patriots whom it was our good fortune to have known."

Such were "P.F.'s" memories of one of the Kilmallock Fenians, as he so ably set them down in the *Offaly Independent* fourteen years ago.

Kilteely was another place in County Limerick where the Fenians were active. The local leader was John Carroll. The men assembled at Nicker, then set out from Crommell, marching in military order into Kilteely. In Kilteely they were joined by Michael Grogan, who had been married only the previous night. They went through the district collecting arms, after which they returned to Kilteely and occupied the police barracks, which had been evacuated some time previously. Michael Grogan was on horseback as he went about unearthing arms and distributing them. The Kilteely Fenians had been "out" since Shrove Tuesday night, 5 March. On Friday they set out for Emly with the intention of joining the Tipperary Fenians who were "out" at Ballyhurst; but when they learned that all was over they disbanded and returned home.

It is worthy of note that the attorney general, when stating the case against the Kilteely Fenians, said:

"I state with considerable regret . . . that the case now under investigation appears to be one of the very few instances in which strong and respectable farmers are found to have taken part and joined this mischievous outbreak."²³

Kilteely he described as "a place where there was a strong feeling among the inhabitants in favour of the Fenian organisation."²⁴

In west Limerick, the Fenians made a brief attack on the police barracks at Ardagh, the small village near which the famous Ardagh Chalice was discovered. The attack amounted to no more than a few shots fired at the building; but, at least, it was a gesture, and a sign that the old race was not completely subdued.

Among the songs the Fenian ballad

singer, Edmond Houlihan, of whom we have already told, used sing was one about Peter O'Neill Crowley, the County Cork Fenian, who met his death in Kilclooney Wood on 31 March, 1867. This is the song:

*As I roamed out one evening in the holy
month of June,
I strayed into an old churchyard, to view a
new-built tomb.
I overheard an old man say, as tears rolled
from his eyes,
It's underneath that cold green sod brave
Peter Crowley lies.*

*Then tell me Peter Crowley, come tell me,
tell me true,
Who stepped into Kilclooney Wood that
day along with you;
Who stood behind that broad oak tree,
and fired that signal gun,
Who fought and died for Ireland, 'twas you
my darling son.*

*The man who fired the signal went to his
lone abode,
For many a mile he shouldered it a dark
and dreary road.
Stiff and cold it's there you lay, a stóirín
gheal mo chroí,
Because you were a Fenian bold and fought
for liberty.*

*God rest you Peter Crowley, you sleep
beneath the clay,
But some day you'll return again to lead
us in the fray;
With a thousand men at your command be
they all both brave and true,
And we'll drive the English from our land
as Irishmen can do.*

Canon Sheehan, a staunch admirer of the Fenians, had a special admiration for Peter O'Neill Crowley. In *Glenanaar* he says:

"I well remember the night poor Crowley was shot in Kilclooney Wood. I remember his funeral, down through the mountain, town and village, amidst a

mourning population, to his grave by the sea."

And again in his *Moonlight of Memory* he recalls the same event:

"I remember how a group of us young lads shivered in the cold March wind there on the college terrace at Fermoy and watched the dark masses of men swaying over the bridge, the coffin conspicuous in their midst; then we turned away with tears of sorrow and anger in our eyes. . . .

"It was computed that at least 5,000 men took part in the procession and shouldered the coffin of the dead patriot over mountain and valley and river, until they placed the sacred burden down there near the sea under the shadow of the church of Ballymacoda."

Elsewhere, he says:

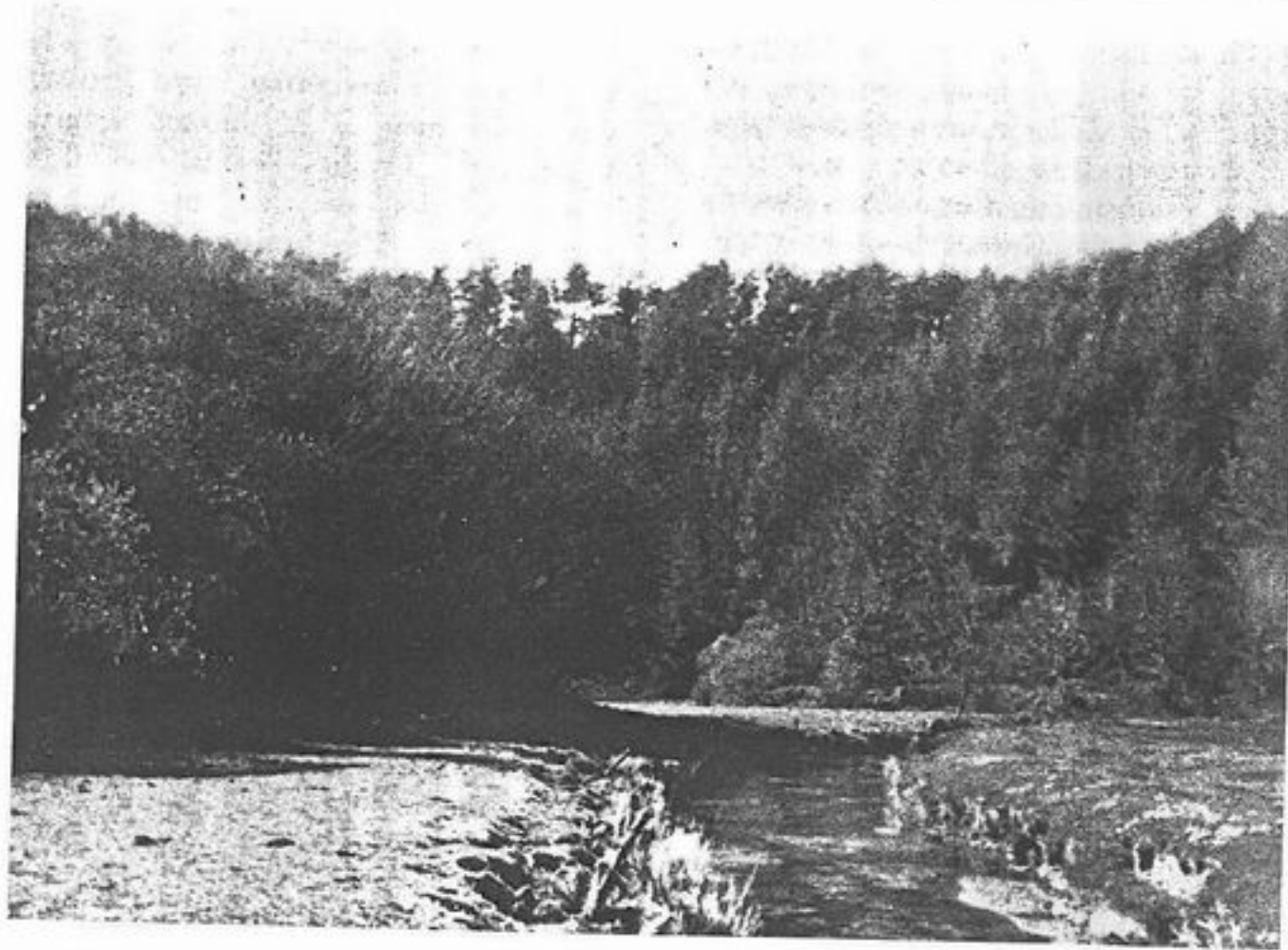
"We saw the body, or thought we saw it, rent and torn and bleeding from English bullets; and some of us were crying, and some of us wanted to scale the college walls in spite of priest and bishop."

But Doctor Keane, Bishop of Cloyne, was a friend of the Fenians, as was Doctor Duggan, Bishop of Clonfert. The dioceses of Cloyne and Clonfert were the only dioceses in Ireland in which the rescripts condemning Fenianism were not promulgated.

Peter O'Neill Crowley, who was "centre" of the Ballymacoda Fenians, was a prosperous farmer, and a deeply religious man. A grand-uncle of his, Father Peter O'Neill, was arrested on a false charge in 1798, and endured two hundred and seventy-five lashes from the Yeos in the old ball-alley in Youghal.²⁵ He was then transported on a Botany Bay convict ship, and spent two years in Australia, labouring among the convicts in Norfolk Island. Granted a "pardon" from the British Government, he returned to Ireland, and was restored by Doctor W. Coppinger, Bishop of Cloyne, to his parish of Ballymacoda.²⁶ He died in 1835, aged eighty-eight years, and is buried in the graveyard

all the houses. It was now near day, and it was quite bright.³¹

The Fenians moved forward very cautiously, but eventually they were observed and were called upon to "Halt and surrender!" Instead, they turned and retreated towards Kilclooney Wood. Rifle fire immediately rang out, and bullets whizzed over their heads. Coming to the Ounagaeragh river, they waded across it, only to be confronted by a party of soldiers



Kilclooney Wood and Ounagaeragh Stream. Peter O'Neill Crowley died in this wood.

drawn up behind a hedge. These at once opened fire on them, compelling them to retreat again to the river. Crowley was hit in the fingers and in the stomach, and Mac Clure received a slight wound in the foot. When they were stepping into the river Crowley was hit again, this time being grievously wounded. As he sank to his knees, Mac Clure caught him in his arms,

and strove desperately to get him to the river bank.

The soldiers still kept up their fire, and Mac Clure's revolver got wet and failed to fire when he presented it at the soldiers. This was the end. Mac Clure was made a prisoner, and Crowley was laid on the river bank. At Crowley's request, Mac Clure read litanies and prayers out of his—Mac Clure's—prayer book, while Crowley answered the responses. Mac Clure was then

handcuffed and, despite all his pleadings, was led away from his dying comrade. Of Mac Clure, Major Henry Redmond, who was present at his arrest, said; "He was the pluckiest devil I ever saw."³² Mac Clure was sentenced to death, but his sentence was later commuted to one of penal servitude for life. He was released in 1870.

From official accounts of the fight, it would appear that there were only three Fenians in Kilclooney Wood on the morning of the fight. But according to one of the ballads we have quoted, there were four men. The fourth man may have been Thomas Walsh of Ballymacoda, who was in the vicinity of the Wood that morning, and who succeeded in escaping. There is, however, a ballad which names a different man:—

O Callaghan and Crowley
They fought there back to back,
And through that bitter winter's day
Threw back each fierce attack,
'Till a bullet pierced brave Crowley's breast,
(For the sergeant's aim was good)
And the banshee cried when Crowley died
In lone Kilclooney Wood.

But Patrick Denihan, a Fenian schoolmaster of Ballyferode, Glenroe, who served five years' imprisonment on Spike Island for his patriotic activities, names still another man in a song that he wrote:

The Ounagaeragh flowed like a passive
stream,
That ne'er was stained with blood;
It gently flowed in a pensive dream
'Till the gallant four had stood
On its banks of green, that were soon to be
Turned to crimson red,
When Crowley and his gallant three
Lay weltering on its bed.

"We are but four," brave Crowley said—
Although the poet once said three—
"We fight just here until we're dead,
For the land that we'd set free."
The "Surrender!" loud had this response.
The Irish angry "No!"
And the soldiers all did fire at once,
Where the Ounagaeragh's waters flow.
The precious blood that Crowley shed
Was carried to the sea;
And the Ounagaeragh roared in its angry bed,
"We'll have revenge for thee!"

Let Lysaght John be remembered still,
And remembered ever more;
His was the brave but stubborn will
That completed the gallant four.
His name I'll inscribe in the Roll of fame,
And write in letters bold;
There is ample room for the patriot's name,
And the flag he did unfold.

Oh, freedom, thou art a sacred thing,
And a fitting theme for me,
To waft on high on an angel's wing
To Crowley and the three,
Who fought to right a nation's wrongs,
An indignant world to show,
That hearts are worthy of a nation's songs
Where Ounagaeragh's waters flow.

Kilclooney Wood is a trysting place
Of the spirits of the night.
The whispering hordes of a maligned race,
That needs not the world's light
Assemble there to discuss the wrongs,
That the centuries hold, till we
Shall add one more song to a nation's songs—
The song of liberty.

When it was obvious that Crowley was dying, Constable Marrinan, a mounted policeman, was dispatched for a priest. He had not gone far when he met Father Timothy O'Connell, curate of Kildorrery, who was on his way to say Mass in nearby Knockanevin church. Father O'Connell immediately hurried to the scene of the fighting and found Crowley lying on a door which was being used as a stretcher. Some of the soldiers had taken off their overcoats and wrapped them around the dying man to make him comfortable. This is how Father O'Connell described the scene when he arrived to administer the Last Rites to the fallen Fenian:

"On my arrival in Kilclooney Wood, I found Doctor Segrave, surgeon to the flying column, busily engaged staunching the fatal wound with one hand, whilst

from a prayer book in the other he read aloud at the young man's request, the Litany of the Holy Name. I saw at once the critical condition of the heroic soul whose life blood was ebbing fast away. It was clear there was no time to waste; and having made him as comfortable as circumstances would permit, by means of the soldier's knapsacks, I then, surrounded by the military and police, administered the Last Sacraments."

Father O'Connell tells us that Crowley's dying words were:

"Father, I have two loves. I am dying to-day for Fatherland. I could die as cheerfully for the Faith."

The story is told in a fine song, that was written, I understand, by Phil O'Neill:—

'Twas March, a springtime fog o'erhung
The sainted Fanahan's vale,
From fair Cloughleefin to Gortroe,
From Skeheen to Castle Gale.
While tideward rushed the Funcheon stream,
Now swelled with many a flood
That rose from rill in each ravine,
Where the Galtee mountains stood.

The pigeons early on the wing
Flit through the morning breeze,
To seek their old accustomed haunts,
Amid Kilclooney's trees;
A peaceful stillness closely hugs
That valley green and fair—
What sage could tell a tragic deed
Would soon be acted there?

Hark! the tramp and tread of soldiers
Breaks the stillness all around
And the misty air of morning
Echoes back the martial sound
Policemen fully armed, marching
Two deep along the road,
Sufficient in that warlike garb
Near danger to forbode.

From Mitchelstown that morning
Came the forces of the Crown,

And hied they to Kilclooney,
Where the stream comes rushing down.
There they pause and reconnoitre,
Seek each vantage point, and hide,
Till that valley fair in morning air
Their presence soon belied.

When suddenly a shot rings through
The misty morning air,
Which frights the blackbird from the bush
And starts the nervous hare.
Another and another till
The hills anear and far,
Re-echo with the clanging
And the clashing of the war.

Into the wood they pour their shot,
Each man with deadly aim—
Never keener are those blood-hounds
Than when tracking human game.
For in that wood three noble hearts
Had sheltered from the blast,
A remnant of the Fenian band
The noblest and the last.

In manhood's prime they nobly came,
To answer country's call;
In that most sacred cause were they
Prepared to stand or fall.
They trod the outlaw's weary way,
They wandered far and near;
Each day was spent in watching
And each night was passed in fear.

And every woe that mortals know,
Their lot now to endure—
Noble Peter Crowley, Brave Kelly and
Mac Clure.

But now at last they're tracked to earth
Their course is well nigh run;
Yet think they not of yielding
While a hand can hold a gun.

Though outside the foe are hundred,
Who in vain "Surrender!" cry
The answer to their summons is:
"We'll fight until we die."
And thus the battle fiercely raged,

The noble three around,
Nor ceased they though a score of foes
Lay wounded on the ground.
At last the fearless Crowley falls,
Shot through breast and hand,
The foes rush in and soon o'erpower
That gallant spartan band.
Mac Clure and Kelly are secured
While Crowley's noble blood
Flows out to sanctity for aye
Kilclooney's lonely wood.

Like Sarsfield on the Landen plain
A heartfelt prayer arose,
In thanks to God for such a death,
In fight with Erin's foes.
And as the priest with Sacred Host
Approached his moss-strewn bed,
The dying hero's eyes beamed bright,
As tenderly he said:

"Two loves I hold within my heart:
The first I give to God;
The second to my native land,
For her this path I've trod,
I've tried to do a brave man's part
In Erin's stormy strife,
And vowed that should the worst befall,
I'd gladly give my life."

Thus closed that scene, that fatal scene,
And England's might had won,
And gloom again o'ercasts the rays
Of Freedom's rising sun.
But to ages yet unborn shall
This narrative be told,
And the name of Peter Crowley
Be inscribed in purest gold.

In the roll of Ireland's martyrs
Shall his name forever shine,
Humble pioneer of freedom,
Scion true of ancient line.
And while the Galtees lift their heads
To Erin's azure sky,
Shall the story of Kilclooney
Tell how Irishmen can die.

O'Neill Crowley's funeral, as Canon Shechan recalls, was a sight never to be forgotten: the procession of women and girls carrying green boughs; then the coffin, heaped high with laurel branches; after that the dead man's sister and the priests; finally, the immense throng of sympathisers.



The Celtic cross on O'Neill Crowley's grave
in Ballymacoda, Co. Cork

The monument above his grave in Ballymacoda churchyard has inscriptions in Irish and in English:

Clann na nGael
Do chuir suas an chrois so
In onóir an fhíor fhlaith thír-ghráigh,
Peadar Ó Néill Ua Cruadhlaoidh
A lámhaíodar saighdiúirí na Sacsan
I gCoill Chill Clúinidh,
Tráth do bhí sé ag troid go tréanmhar
Ar son a tíre

An t-aonú lá déag ar fhichead
De mhí na Márta
I mbliain ocht gcéad déag seacht
agus trí fhichead
D'aois Chríost
Agus an cúigiú bliain déag ar fhichead
Dá aois féin
Go ndéana Dia trócaire ar a anam.
Amen.

Erected by the Irish People
To the memory of the Patriot,
Peter O'Neill Crowley,
Who was shot dead by the
British soldiery
Whilst bravely fighting
For his Country's Independence
At Kilclooney Wood on
March 31st, 1867,
In the 35th year of his age.
Requiescat in Pace. Amen.

Another monument to Crowley stands on the summit of a low green hill at Kilclooney. The hill is surrounded by a semi-circle of woods, through which a silver stream, the Ounagaeragh, flows. The Kilclooney monument, which is in the form of a Celtic cross, was erected in 1898; and the men who put it there had this inscription carved upon it:

Erected 1898
To the memory of
Peter O'Neill Crowley
Killed in action
By British Crown Forces
In Kilclooney Wood
On March 31st, 1867.
R.I.P.
God save Ireland.

Not in stone only, but in a score of songs, does the memory of Peter O'Neill Crowley survive. S. E. Ó Cearbhaill sings of him in Irish:—

Fainic, a Abhainn na Laoi
Go neafaiseach ag gluaiseacht
Fan do shlí
Faoin droichead seo,
Droichead Ué Néill Crualaoich—
Fainic, a Abhainn
Nach mbéarfá id' ruathar
Chun an áigéin síos
Cuimhne an laoi
A shil fialshuil a chroí
Ar ár son, a chine féin;
I gCoill Chill Chluaine d'éag
Bliain bheannaithe na bhFíiní—
Fainic, nach ionann dod' neamhómós
A Abhainn chóir
Agus satailt ghlandearúdach bróg
Thar Dhroichead Uí Chrualaoich;
Thar dhroichead na mblianta—
Satailt ar a bhrí
Neamhshuim san íobairt mhór
Beagbeann ar na smaointe
A spreag é lena linn
Le go gcuirfí an bodach
In áit an rí—
Bás beannaithe go fial, go cróga
Le síoda a chur
Ar ghabhair
A fhanfadh
Ina ngabhair i gcónaí—

Gluais leat, a Abhainn na Laoi
Imigh leat fan do shlí—
Ní tógtha ortsa an neamhshuim.

A singer in a ballad programme on television rises and sings "Erin's Lovely Lee"—

And one of them stepped up to me,
and asked me did I know,
The mountains of Kilclooney and the
Glen of Aherlow,
Or could I tell where Crowley fell,
his native land to free,
Or the tower that Captain Mackey sacked
down Erin's Lovely Lee.

'Tis I can tell where Crowley fell,
'twas in Kilclooney's Wood,

And the tower that Captain Mackey sacked,
'twas by his side I stood,
When he gave the word we raised a cheer
that made the tyrants frown,
We raised the shamrock on our flag,
the Harp without the Crown.

I have attempted to make this article, among other things, a kind of O'Neill Crowley anthology, gathering together in it as many as I could discover of the songs and ballads that were written about him. I know that I have not gleaned them all, even with this final piece which follows:—

"To-morrow, oh, to-morrow",
said a Fenian in his dream,
"I'll die for dear old Ireland
by Ounagaeragh stream,
That moves along in liberty, as Irish
people should,
Singing freedom's own sweet rhapsody
by famed Kilclooney Wood."
'Twas Peter O'Neill Crowley,
now resting for the night,
Before the fatal morning of his bold
and daring fight,
Not knowing that someone hurried on
who bore a traitor's frown,
With welcome information for the forces
of the Crown.

"Arise! Arise!" the warning words
are sounded in his ear,
The roads resound with martial tramp
of Redcoats drawing near;
But "Ready, boys, get ready, boys,"
a firm voice did say,
"And may God direct us for the best
as out we fight our way."
Thus in the wood three Fenian hearts
are beating fast and strong,
While foemen trained, in numbers great,
move cautiously along;
Above, below, the wood, the stream
and Fairy Palace lawn,
They're enclosing in a ring of steel
while lift the mists of dawn.

At last a shot, the blackbird scared,
is flying from tree to tree;
"Surrender!" shouts the angry foe,
"for England's men are we."
But O'Crowley answers quickly in accents
loud and high,
"We never will surrender,
we'll fight until we die!"
Fir branches fall as musket balls
the wood are cutting through,
Whence did reply with deadly aim
the valiant-hearted few.
And one by one the hirelings fall
in numbers nigh a score,
And bite the early springtime blade
and stain it with their gore.

Alas, a groan, the gun drops from
a patriot's stricken band,
And brutal men still fire on him
(no mercy from their hand),
While far away the Banshee wailed
around the saddened home
Of Peter Crowley's childhood where
he never more would roam.
And whilst the sagart cleansed his soul
from every sinful stain,
Around his comrades' hands were placed
the handcuffs and the chain,
That led them to the transport ship
upon the surging sea,
Because they'd have preferred to die
than live in slavery.

In Ballymacoda churchyard a martyr's
ashes rest,
And high in heaven his soul's in bliss
with God's eternal blest.
Let us be true to Róisín Dubh, and let us
as we should,
Remember O'Neill Crowley and famed
Kilclooney Wood.

As I have mentioned at the beginning of this article, the Fenian tradition was strong in my native district. I have told, too, how I saw an old man who was one of the Fenians who took part in the Kil-

mallock barrack attack in 1867. His name was Michael Wall, but he was more familiarly known as Mickey Wall. When I first saw him he was living with a nephew of his, a man named Michael O'Rourke, at Ballynaught, on the Brucee-Kilmallock road. We used pass by the house on our way to school.

I remember seeing Michael Wall a number of times. I have a distinct recollection of an occasion that I saw him walking slowly, with the aid of two walking sticks, along by a bush fence in a field beside his nephew's house. I would have been about seven or eight years then; and I recall an older school companion pointing him out to us and saying: "That is Mickey Wall; he was a Fenian." He died not so long afterwards, at the age of ninety-six years.

On the night of 28 May, 1920, the strong police barracks at Kilmallock, the same that the Fenians had in vain assailed on a March morning in '67, was attacked and burned by the I.R.A. And among the victors that May night in 1920 were the grandsons and grandnephews of Fenians who fought and failed there fifty-three years before. The news of their success brought joy to the hearts of the few old Fenians who still survived in the locality. Michael Wall came out to meet a small party of Brucee and Ballynaught I.R.A. men returning from the fight. When he saw them approach he was heard to say something, half to himself, in Irish. When they came up, he shook each of them warmly by the hand, and congratulated them on having succeeded where he and his comrades had failed many long years before. The seeds sown by the young men of '65 and '67 had come to their miraculous ripening.

Michael Wall was a brother of Willie Wall, the "centre" or leader of the Kilmallock Fenians, who was deported in 1865. To show how the Fenian tradition ran in families in our district one need only cite the following instance. When Willie Wall was waiting at Kilmallock railway

station for the train that would take him on the first part of the road to exile in the United States, he handed to his sister that poem of farewell, which appears earlier in this article. This sister in the course of time became Mrs. Joseph Lynch, and it was in the house of her son, Johnny Lynch, at Tankardstown—a stone's throw from Dick Walsh's workshop, where the Fenians had their arms depot in '67—that the first recruitment for Ireland's first I.R.A. flying column took place, as one may read in *Limerick's Fighting Story*, in an article by Commandant-General Donncha Ó hAnnagáin, entitled "The Flying Column originated in East Limerick". That was in June 1920.

Deborah Lynch of Tankardstown, an aunt of Johnny Lynch, married Thomas Wall of Ardykeohane, Bruff. Two of their children were Brigadier General Seán Wall, of the East Limerick Brigade, I.R.A., killed in action in May 1921; and Canon Tomás de Bhál, life-long supporter of the cause of the Irish language and of Irish freedom.

Canon de Bhál, then Father de Bhál, and Father Michael Hayes, were the two priests against whom General Sir John Maxwell, Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in Ireland, asked Doctor O'Dwyer, Bishop of Limerick, to take disciplinary action after the Easter Week Rising, because of both priests' open association with the leaders of the Rising and with the Irish Volunteer movement in general. The Bishop's scathing reply to the General is well known. He told Maxwell that he had read carefully his allegations against Reverend Father Hayes and Reverend Father Wall, but did not see in them any justification for disciplinary action on his part. "They are both excellent priests," he wrote, "who hold strong National views, but I do not know that they have violated any law, civil or ecclesiastical."

One story, they say, borrows another. Some time before the Fenian Rising a

pump sinker and his assistant came to sink a well for Johnny Lynch's grandfather. Fenianism was in the air in the district at the time. The assistant was a stranger, and for some reason it began to be rumoured locally that he was a spy. The assistant heard the rumours. While at Lynch's he used to sleep at night with the son of the house, who was Johnny Lynch's father.

On this particular night the assistant mentioned the rumours that were circulating about him to young Lynch.

"I'll show you good proof why I'd never be a spy," he said, as he took off his shirt, and showed on his bare back the marks of a flogging he had once received. He had been active in the '48 period, he told his young companion, and one night he jumped out over a roadside fence, right into the arms of the military. He was taken and savagely flogged. A kindly soldier gave him a lead bullet, and told him to put it in his mouth and grit his teeth on it while the flogging was being administered. When this story became known in the district the man who was suspected of being a spy, became, overnight, a hero.

Looking back across the century that has elapsed since 1867, one realises that Fenianism was one of the greatest national movements ever to have come out of Ireland. It was a movement that cannot be fairly judged by the failure of the Rising. Its potentialities in 1865 were enormous. Even in its decline, it was bold enough to take the fight for Irish freedom into Canada and Britain itself. In its hour of material defeat it was spiritually strong in the nobility of its members—in, for example, the graciousness of Kickham, in the saintliness of O'Neill Crowley, in the heroic dignity of the Manchester Martyrs. Most important of all, Fenianism lived on after Tallaght and Clarkenwell, after Kilmallock and Kildoonney, an idea undefeated, that could truly say: *Beidh lá eile ag an bPaorach!* Yes, there would be another day, for it was men who had been "rebaptised in the

Fenian faith" who made the Rising of Easter Week.

And it is a strange fact that it was Fenianism, more than anything else, that hastened the disestablishment of the Protestant Church in Ireland. In 1868, in the British House of Commons, Mr. Gathorne Hardy, M.P., asked Gladstone:

"Why did you not deal with the Irish Church in 1866, when you asked for the suspension of the *Habeas Corpus Act*?"

To which Gladstone replied:

"My answer is, for a perfectly plain and simple reason. In the first place, circumstances were not ripe then as they are now. Circumstances, I repeat, were not ripe in so far as we did not then know so much as we know now with respect to the intensity of Fenianism."³³

Another point that might be mentioned with regard to the Fenian movement is that it was an intensely Irish movement, one to which the ordinary people of Ireland rallied. For the first time since Sarsfield's days Irishmen followed an Irish military leadership that was predominantly Catholic. Hard things and uncharitable things were said about the Fenian men in their day by persons who utterly misunderstood the character of the men concerned and the nobility and unselfishness of their motives.

A. M. Sullivan, author of *The Story of Ireland*, was totally opposed to the Fenian Rising. He said of it: "Of all the insensate attempts at revolution recorded in history, this one assuredly was preëminent." But though he utterly disagreed with the idea of calling a Rising in 1867, he had no condemnation for the men who answered the call. The only redeeming features of the venture, he said, were the courage, the intense religious feeling and the nobility of the men engaged in it. "On the days immediately preceding 5 March, the Catholic churches were crowded by the youth of the country, making spiritual preparations for what they believed would

be a struggle in which many would fall and few survive."³⁴

He spoke of "their noble humanity to the prisoners whom they captured, their scrupulous regard for private property, and their earnest anxiety to carry on their struggle without infraction in aught of the laws and rules of honourable warfare."³⁵

Singling out one of the Fenian leaders for special mention, he wrote:

"The last episode of the Rising was one, the immediate and remote effects of which on public feeling were of astonishing magnitude, the capture and death of Peter O'Neill Crowley in Kilclooney Wood, near Mitchelstown. Crowley was a man highly esteemed, widely popular, and greatly loved in the neighbourhood; a man of

respectable position, and of good education, and of character so pure and life so blameless, that the peasantry revered him almost as a saint. . . ."³⁶

Telling of Crowley's and his comrades' sojourn in the Kilclooney neighbourhood, he had this to say:

"It turned out that the fugitives, during their concealment in the wood, under Crowley's direction, never omitted compliance with the customary Lenten devotions. Every night they knelt around the embers of their watch-fire, and recited aloud the Rosary, and at the moment of their surprise by the soldiery they were at their morning prayers."³⁷

Finally, he makes it clear why Ireland took the Fenians to her heart:

NOTES

(Chief Sources and Abbreviations used in connection with them)

- WTA *Wolfe Tone Annual* 1958
 ABHI *A Basic History of Ireland*, by Micheál Breathnach.
 IR *The Irish Republic*, by Dorothy Macardle.
 CCIP *The Catholic Church and Irish Politics in the Eighteen Sixties*, by E. R. Norman (Dublin Historical Association publication, 1965).
 PF *The Phoenix Flame*, by Desmond Ryan.
 HOI *History of Ireland*, by Rev. E. A. D'Alton, LL.D., M.R.I.A.
 SOI *The Story of Ireland*, by A. M. Sullivan.
 RPSC *Report of Proceedings at the Special Commissions 1867 for the County and City of Limerick*.
 JH *Fenianism in Cork and Limerick*. A paper prepared in 1958 by the late Jim Hurley, Registrar of U.C.C.
 LIC Letter by Íde Ní Choindealbháin, M.A., in *Sunday Press*, March 27th 1960.
 FKW *Fenians of Kilclooney Wood*. Article by Íde Ní Choindealbháin, M.A., in *Journal of Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, No. 49. 1944.

SOURCES

- 1, *The Fenian Gun*, by Phil O'Neill; 2, WTA; 3, ABHI; 4, IR; 5, WTA; 6, CCIP; 7, PF; 8, *Ibid*; 9, CCIP; 10, *Ibid*; 11, *Ibid*; 12, WTA; 13, HOI; 14, PF; 15, "When I was a little Girl"; 16, SOI; 17, RPSC; 18, *Ibid*; 19, *Ibid*; 20, JH; 21, RPSC; 22, *Ibid*; 23, *Ibid*; 24, *Ibid*; 25, LIC; 26, *Ibid*; 27, FKW; 28, *Ibid*; 29, *Ibid*; 30, *Ibid*; 31, *Ibid*; 32, *Ibid*; 33, SOI; 34, *Ibid*; 35, *Ibid*; 36, *Ibid*; 37, *Ibid*; 38, *Ibid*.

I have also used some material which I extracted from an article on the fight at Kilclooney Wood that appeared in *An Cosantóir* in, I think, the early 1940's.

GABHAIM BUÍOCHAS LEO

I wish to express my thanks to the following: to Siobhán, Bean Uí Mhuirthile, Bóthar an Chláiste, Corcaigh, for letting me have the text of paper on *Fenianism in Cork and Limerick*, prepared by her late husband—*Solas na Soilse dá anam!*—; to the Editor of the *Offaly Independent* for his kind permission to quote from article by "P.F." on Edmund Houlihan; to the late Joseph Gaffney, Kilmallock; to the late Dick Walsh, Kilmallock; to the late Johnny Lynch, Tankardstown—*Go ndéana Dia trócaire orthu uile!*—and to Dick Walsh, Tankardstown, all of whom taught me much, in one way or another, about our local Fenians, and from whom, I hope, I have inherited something of Fenian tradition and to the Editor of *Agus* for permission to print the poem, "Fainic 7rl.", from issue of Meitheamh, 1967.

M.J.

"In the end proposed to themselves by those slain or captured Irishmen—the desire to lift their country up from her fallen state, to staunch her wounds, to right her wrongs—their countrymen all were at one with them; and the purity, the virtue of their motives, were warmly recognized by men who had been foremost in reprehending the hapless courage by which they had immolated themselves. . . .

"Never in any age, or in any country, did men bear themselves in such strait more nobly than those men of '67. They were not men to blush for."³⁸

Nor has Ireland ever blushed for the Fenians. Instead she has fondly sung their praises:

*It hung above the kitchen fire,
 Its barrel long and brown,
 And one day, with a boy's desire,
 I climbed and took it down.*

*My father's eyes with anger flashed;
 He cried: "What have you done?
 I wish you'd left it where it was—
 That's my old Fenian gun."*

*I placed it o'er the fire once more;
 I heard my father sigh;
 I knew his thoughts were turning back
 To days now long gone by.
 And then I vowed within my heart:
 "I'll be my father's son,
 And if Ireland ever needs my aid
 I'll carry a Fenian gun."*

*That's years ago; I've grown a man,
 And weathered many a gale;
 The last long year was spent inside
 A dreary English jail.
 I've done my part; I'll do it still,
 Until the fight is won!
 And when Ireland's free we'll bless the men
 Who carried a Fenian gun.*

