

MICHAEL HOGAN IN AMERICA

1886-'89

By Jim Kemmy

Part Three HOMECOMING



ate took a hand in bringing Michael Hogan's New York exile to an end. In December 1889, the secretary of the Limerick Congregated Trades, John Hogan (no relation of the poet), had his attention drawn to a paragraph in the **Cork Examiner**, in which it was reported that the Bard of Thomond had died in America.

John Hogan, one of the Bard's few friends in Limerick, was deeply grieved at the sad news. A pleasant surprise was, however, in store for him, later on the same evening, when he went to the Mechanics' Institute and the

caretaker handed him a letter bearing an American postmark, the address being in the Bard's handwriting. He found, to his joy, that the poet was alive and well.

Michael Hogan poured out all his troubles to his friend, and expressed an earnest wish to come back to his native city. John Hogan wrote back an encouraging letter and, on Christmas week, the poet, in his reply, described his fond memories of the Christmas Eve sound of St. Mary's bells.

On 6th January, 1889, John Hogan wrote the following letter to the Bard: (In this and other letters, the original spelling and punctuation are retained).

Limerick, Jan. 6th. 1889.

My Dear Michael,

I received your letter on Dec. 28th. so that I had not the pleasure of hearing St. Mary's Bells for your sake I hope on next Christmas Eve, with God's help we may have the good fortune of hearing them together. I was shocked with the treatment you received from Weeks, & more than astonished that a man of your well known intelligence could be duped by a vulgar fellow of his repute. I knew him well & was astonished to hear that a man of his years (he's well over 70) could be possessed of the swaggering propensities which distinguished him in his youth, but no matter, young or old he would not dare for a moment to treat you in Limerick as he has done in New York. I was under the impression that Ed. Fitzgerald was a carpenter & so was a good many more here but I see by your letter I was mistaken, all I'll say at present about him & his noble hearted wife is that they may never know the want of a friend. I asked your wife for "The Golden Balls" and got them from her which I'll send you with this letter.

With regard to your Mother, your wife told me she is in the Workhouse & in good health. Frank Donnellan's widow is in Thomond Cottage. To all intents & purposes the Cottage don't appear to have the Bard's blessing. I may tell you that your wife seems to be enjoying good health. I hope with God's blessing to see you both living happily together again, there is an old saying - "The school of experience teaches many useful lessons".

I was very sorry to hear about your sight I hope & trust in God it won't be worse. With regard to your friend Tom Dooly he was charmed to hear from you & proud to be the recipient of your enlog. Now with regard to Burns the Scottish Poet I heard the late Stephen Joseph Meany say that we in Limerick had a man in our midst his superior, well that man was living then and is yet thank God I won't say who he meant nor will I ask you to guess. By the bye in your next I will ask you to send me a written copy of the Askeaton Goat.

Now with regard to the Bard's return & what I propose doing. At present the Congregated Trades amongst themselves are making up subscriptions to present Tom Dooly with a testimonial only for that I would be at your business before now, but before another month will elapse please God I shall make the effort on your behalf. As for obstacles coming in my way I fear them not no matter from what quarter they come. I shall ask the co-operation of the Congregated Trades, when that done I shall call on a Committee. I'll have circulars printed & sent to every one of the Parnellite members of Parliament asking them to forward a National movement. My plan will not be localised. I shall try every public man in Ireland who calls himself a nationalist to aid us in the movement. If I fail it won't be my fault but I am sure of those that can never see failure & in your case with God's help & my own determination I must & will succeed.

I remain Dear Michael
Yours faithfully
John Hogan Sec.
Congregated Trades

Mr. M. Hogan
Bard of Thomond.

N.B. Dear Michael. My connection with Trades organizations has taught me that the secret of success is proper organization. I think I am well up in that matter therefore my motto is always & ever shall be. Nil Desperandum.

J. Hogan

Despite a variety of difficulties, John Hogan was as good as his word. He was instrumental in setting up the committee to bring back the Bard, and became its chief fund-raiser. Right through the year, he continued to promote the poet's cause. But, true to form, Michael Hogan, from the comfort of the Fitzgerald's country cottage in Corona, continued to complain — this time about the reluctance of some prominent Limerick citizens to act on the committee and to contribute to the fund.

As the campaign gathered momentum, two of the Bard's fellow poets responded with their own literary contributions. In a poem titled, "Bring Back the Bard", written and published in the local press in August, James De Quincey made this spirited and emotional plea in his effort to rally the citizens of the city to the cause:

"Oh! Limerick, if thou wouldst not have thy name
A bye-word on thy sister cities' lips—
If thou wouldst save the bright star of thy fame
From the black sink of shame wherein it dips—
Unloose thee from thine apathy's fell thrall;
Awake! arise! at duty's clarion call—
Bring back the Bard.
Bring back the Bard, oh! city hard of heart,
'Twere time that thou bethought thee of thy part—
Bring back the Bard.

The spirit voices of his youthful haunts

Are raised against thee and the cruel doom
Which thus inflicts the poet's worst of wants—
The loss of native skies, and air, and bloom—
Yet heed'st thou not the charge against thee made;
Wilt thou, like Florence, too, thy name degrade?—
Bring back the Bard.
Bring back the Bard, oh! City hard of heart,
'Twere time that thou bethought thee of thy part—
Bring back the Bard".

In another poetic appeal "Come Back to Green Erin", Francis Whelan, then living in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford, expressed similar sentiments:

"Come back to green Erin, come back o'er the sea,
New York's iron vapour is poison to thee.
Come back from the land of the cold-hearted stranger,
Come back from the land of hardship and danger;
Come back to green Erin, come back o'er the sea,
New York is no place for a stranger like thee".

The committee itself, with Mayor Francis O'Keeffe as chairman and John Hogan as joint honorary secretary, was — considering the Bard's past activities — remarkably representative of most sections of Limerick society. On 27th September, the committee published 1000 copies of the following appeal:

TOWN HALL,

Limerick, 27th September, 1889.

Bard of Thomond Testimonial.

A 58609

DEAR SIR,

MR. MICHAEL HOGAN, of Limerick, the gifted author of "The Lays and Legends of Thomond." is at the present time in very poor circumstances and bad health in New York, where he emigrated nearly three years ago.

A Committee has been formed to make arrangements for bringing him home to Limerick, as his condition gives much concern to his friends; and the coming American winter is looked forward to with the saddest forebodings by the Bard, who yearns with the intense desire of an exiled Irish Poet to revisit his native city, sing his last song within the sound of St. Mary's Bells, and pass the remainder of his days breathing the invigorating air from off the hills of Clare.

The Citizens have already generously subscribed funds to bring Mr. Hogan back, and encouraged with the kindness the members of the Committee have received, they hope to be able to place him, when he arrives, in an humble, but permanent home, amidst the scenes he loved to sing of, and as his wants are small, provide him with a maintenance for the remainder of his days.

With this view, the Committee have extended the scope of their appeal beyond local aid, and confidently hope that you will assist them in their efforts to solace the declining years of one who sang so powerfully of native land.

As the matter, under the exceptional circumstances, is urgent, your contribution to the fund is respectfully requested. Acknowledgements thereof will appear in the local press (unless otherwise desired).

We have the honor, to be, yours very faithfully.

FRANCIS. A. O'KEEFFE, M.P., Mayor of Limerick, Chairman.

MICHAEL MURPHY, President, Congregated Trades, } Treasurers
DAVID BEGLEV, T.C., William-street, Limerick, }

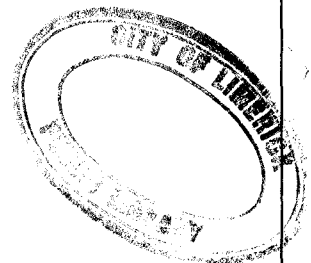
JOHN HOGAN, Secretary Congregated Trades, } Hon. Secs.
JOHN G. FITZGERALD, }

Committee :

Messrs Stephen O'Mara, T.C.
T. M' Mahon Cragan, J.P. T.C.
William Spillane, J.P.
Robert McDonnell, J.P. T.C.
W. J. O'Donnell, (City High Sheriff.)
Jeremiah Anglim, T.C.
Sir James Spaight
Alderman Cownihan, J.P.
Alderman Gaffney, J.P.
Alderman Ryan
Messrs. Bryan O'Donnell, T.C.
Stephen Dowling, J.P., T.C.

Messrs. P. J. McSweeney, T.C.
J. Clune, T.C.
M. G. Dowling, T.C.
Daniel Kennelly, T.C.
Thomas O'Farrell, P.L.G.
M. Spain, T.C.
P. Kenna, T.C.
J. McCarthy, Solr., T.C.
Charles O'Donnell, Solr.
J. P. McNamara
C. H. Fitt, City Sub-Sheriff.
John O'Donnell, High-street
James Flynn, Royal Hotel

Messrs. William Nolan, Mallow-st
J. T. Creagh, Thomondgate
Thomas Dooley, Treasurer
Congregated Trades
John Godsell, do.
James Bowles, do.
A. Donovan, do.
Matt Brennan
Thomas M. Stewart, President,
Sarsfield Branch, Irish
National League
M. O'H. Lawler, Secretary, City
Branch.



John Hogan kept the Bard fully informed of the committee's progress. On the 7th October, in reply to another letter from the poet, he describes the work involved in the distribution of the testimonial leaflets, as well as listing

some of the subscriptions made to the fund, and gives special praise to the efforts of his trade union colleague, Michael Murphy, the president of the Limerick Congregated Trades:

Limerick, Oct. 7th. 1889

My Dear Michael,

I received your very long & welcome letter on Saturday 5th. inst. It was not Henry O'Shea refused to act on your Committee, it don't matter much as we can very well afford to dispense with an individual as the enclosed circular with names affixed can testify. Your friend John Fitzgerald is untiring in his exertions, we sent out 40 circulars on Friday Evg. last & the receivers are responding already, on yesterday Evg. we sent out 100, we got 1000 printed, we shall circulate the whole. I think it right you should know some of your friends through me. Well I went to the post office Rutland Street this Evg. for 100 postage stamps, the Postmaster (P. Mortished) an old friend & well wisher of yours gave me 5 shillings for the Bard's Testimonial with a warmness of heart that enhanced its value tenfold, as I must tell you I never asked him for a cent, he has a longing anxiety to see your Bardship. The Treasurer of the fund Mr. David Begley TC with characteristic generosity subscribed a pound & his attendance and enthusiasm at our meetings on behalf of you are beyond all praise. I may also mention Jeremiah Anglim TC another of the right sort, always punctual at our meetings, Mr. James Flynn (Royal Hotel) is to accompany Michael Murphy the President of the Trades & myself through the City collecting funds this week. I told you on a former occasion that Murphy was a brick & he has proved that, he gave 10 shillings, as his subscription towards the fund of Mr. James Flynn I could not speak in terms of sufficient praise, the next time again I'll mention those & other friends who are putting their shoulder to the wheel will be with God's blessing personally.

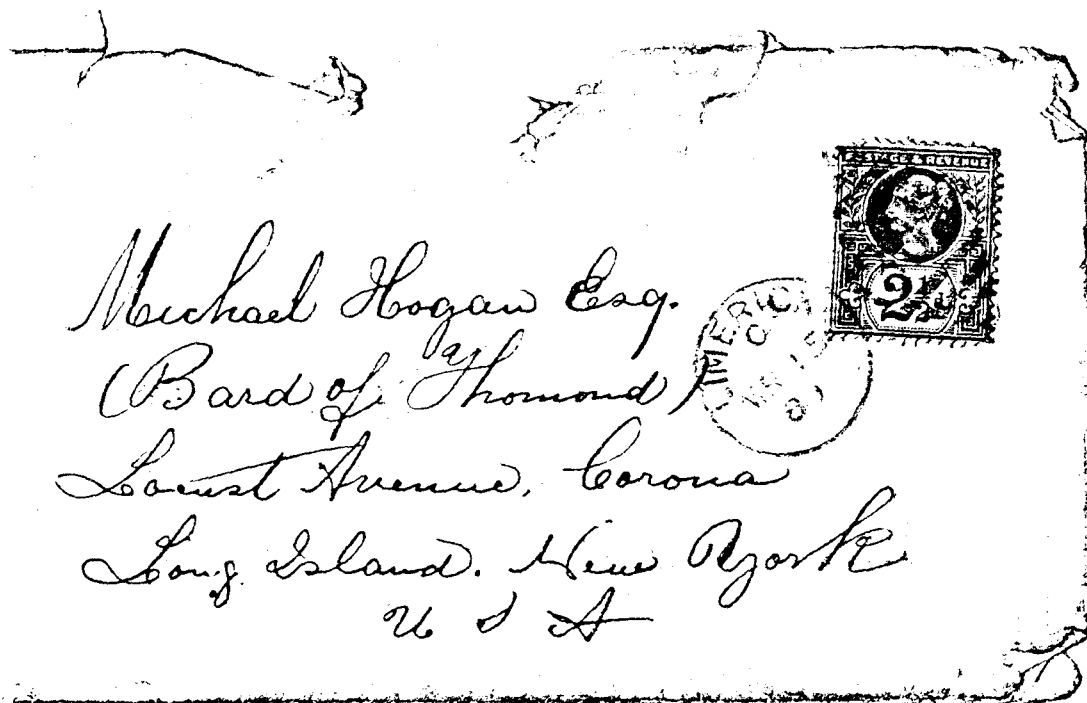
I sent you a letter last week with reference to your coming home, you must make up your mind at once we are prepared to send for you immediately. Your presence at home will help to stimulate the Committee; nothing shall be left undone to make the business as successful as possible, I sent circulars to all the parties whose names & addresses you furnished me with, I can assure you Dear Michael that I never took part in any work in my life that gives me greater pride & pleasure than the movement on your behalf. I got 2 papers from Mrs. Costelloe on yesterday there was 2 splendidly written paragraphs relative to the bringing home of your Bardship. I have so much to attend to just now that I cannot spare as much time as I would wish to write to you more fully.

Yours faithfully,
John Hogan, Sec.

M. Hogan. Bard of Thomond.

N.B. I have all your letters preserved they are worth keeping as literary gems. Your last was better than anything that ever emanated from Mark Twain.

J.H.



A letter sent to Michael Hogan, on 15th March, 1889.



BANK PLACE.

Limerick, Oct. 31st. 1889

My Dear Michael We had a committee
 meeting last night, & they decided on sending
 Wishing you a speedy & happy voyage
 I remain Dear Michael, Your fraternally,
 John Hogan, Sec. Trades

The last letter sent by John Hogan to the Bard of Thomond in New York

In his last letter to America, John Hogan stated his intention of contacting James Bannatyne, on the return of the wealthy flour mill owner from a "tour of pleasure". In an earlier **Shawn A Scoob** pamphlet, the Bard had lampooned Bannatyne, whom he scathingly dismissed as

"Shemus, you peddling meal-mouse." But time had healed some of the old wounds. Limerick's public conscience had been stirred by the news of the poet's plight. On 31st October, John Hogan wrote:

Limerick. Oct. 31st. 1889

My Dear Michael,

We had a committee meeting last night & they decided on sending you £15 to enable you to come home at once. I have very great pleasure in enclosing you a draft for that sum payable at the Bank of Montreal, 59 Wall Street. New York. Let me know as soon as you can when you intend to sail, & what steamer you will embark in so as I might expect on what date you may arrive in Queenstown. I was thinking that I would be well to send your wife to meet you, if you are of the same opinion I shall be very glad to give her a little sum of money for that purpose. I received all your letters & was sorry to hear that your very good friend Mrs. Fitzgerald is not improving.

James Flynn (Royal Hotel) Patt Kenna, Michael Murphy & myself went out collecting money yesterday. we were out about 3 hours, when a deluge of rain hunted us home, we gathered £14.10s. the last 10 shillings we got was from your old friend - Shelton Connelly. Alderman Ryan is Daniel Ryan, butter merchant, poor John is in very bad health for a long time past, but I'll make it my business to see him before long. Sir James Spaight gave us a pound. I said to him you can do more than give a subscription, he said yes I had always a great wish for poor Hogan and will be very happy to do all I can amongst my friends for him.

At our meeting last night we appointed more collectors, who are to go out on Monday next. Mr. McMahon Cregan was absent, he is suffering from a cold, we are only in the beginning of our work now. Mr. James Bannatyne is out of Limerick on a tour of pleasure for several weeks past, Sir James Spaight told me he'll be at home next week, please God I'll have a personal interview with him. I'll look up Wm. Abraham's address & mail him a circular at once. I have a great many things to say when I see you which would take too long to put in paper, therefore you must get through it in this way - I called to see a young man this Evg. - a friend of mine for a subscription towards the Bards Testimonial. I was expecting to get 5s. - he handed me a pound note; I have to see more friends tonight again & why should I be delaying any longer. John G. Fitz is to write to you this Evg. Wishing you a speedy & happy voyage.

I remain Dear Michael, Yours fraternally
John Hogan, Sec. Trades.

Mr. M.Hogan B.T.

Presented with this **fait accompli**, the Bard did not dither. But, once again, he could not resist a parting shot. In his memoirs, he pays tribute to Edward and Marcelle Fitzgerald for their hospitality, and gives this version of his homecoming:

"There was a fund of £84 realised. It could not be more for there were many testimonials going on at the same time for patriots who were after coming out of prisons where they had spent some months for loving Ireland wisely ...

On the 20th November I bade farewell to my friends, the generous Geraldines, and left New York on the steamship "Germanic" and arrived in Queenstown, after a calm passage, on the 29th. On that night I found myself at home in my native city of Sarsfield".

So Michael Hogan celebrated Christmas in Limerick, and heard St. Mary's bells peal out their welcoming message. But the 57 year old, near-blind Bard had now entered the last decade of his tortured life.