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# Remembering the Terror

## ODDS AND ENDS "AN MANGAIRE SUGACH"

When I was in the third standard in the Primary School a teacher read for us, a number of days in succession, some extracts from *My Fight for Irish Freedom*. We were amazed at many of the daring exploits described in the book, and were even more amazed when we learned that the author of the book, the man who had all those incredible brushes with death, still lived. And Dan Breen was to live for many a day after the teacher had read those extracts from his book for us. Indeed, to us a phrase appropriate to the old warrior himself—he did not finally hand in his gun until the Saturday of last week, more than a century after the exploits of Solohead and Knocklong. Go dtuga Dia suaimhneas siorraí dhó!

In treating of the men who made the War of Independence the most successful of all the Irish fights for freedom it has almost invariably been the custom to give the lion's share of the credit for that success to those at the top in Dublin, the Dail Eireann cabinet. But this is to ignore the part played by the actual men in the field, the men who faced and fought the might of the forces of the British Empire, men like Breen and Treacy, men like Lynch and Barry.

It is now half a century since the War of Independence was waged, and only those who lived through that terrible period have any idea of what the Irish people had then to endure. In the 1970 *Capuchin Annual*, which has just been published, and which covers the events of 1920 in Ireland, there is an article on "Tipperary's Fight in 1920" by Fr. Colmcille, O. Cist. From that excellent article I have chosen a few items which will give the younger reader some idea of the frightful things that happened that year, in this case in Dan Breen's native county.

### THE MIDNIGHT CALL

Fr. Colmcille, having told how Holy Cross police barracks had been unsuccessfully attacked by the I.R.A., goes on:

"A second attack on the barracks produced no result except that, by way of reprisal (apparently), the British raided a house in which a dead girl was being 'waked' and murdered a poor simpleton who left the house about three o'clock in the morning. His body was riddled with bullets. Shots were also fired through the door and windows of the house in which the corpse of the girl lay. At the inquest which followed, the jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against the forces of the Crown."

On January 20th, 1920, a policeman was shot in Thurles. That night military and police appeared on the streets of the town armed with rifles. In the words of Fr. Colmcille: "They then commenced to 'shoot up' the town. Fusillades of shots continued for several hours, ceasing only at 2 a.m. Hand grenades were thrown into shops and houses and three or four buildings, including the

came in the direction of the barracks he would get all the information he wanted. A few nights later a number of armed men came to the door to the Mac Carthy house asking for 'Mac Carthy'. James Mac Carthy, a brother of Michael, went down to open the door. As he opened the door he was asked his name, and immediately two shots were fired and he fell dead in the hall-way. As his sister ran down the street in her bare feet for the priest, shots were fired after her.

"On the following day at midnight disguised men, believed to be police, came to the house of Thomas O. Dwyer of Bouladuff, the owner of a public house called The Ragg, and shot him dead. The July returned a verdict of wilful murder against unknown members of the R.I.C. Three days later a party of police passed by in motor lorries shouting: 'Dwyer is dead and a very good job'. They came back to the house and smashed all the bottles in the shop and fired shots through the ceiling. On 24 July lorry loads of police returned to Bouladuff where they entered the house of the O. Dwyer family at the Ragg and, having slaked their thirst with drink, filled the lorries with liquor and then completely

wrecked the shop and the house."

### MURDER MOST FOUL

Here is another example of British methods in Ireland in 1920, as cited by Fr. Colmcille:

"On 19 October, Frank and Ned Dwyer of Ballydavid were barbarously murdered by men in military uniform accompanied by one man in police uniform. The murderers knocked at the door at 12.15 a.m. The door was opened by Kate Dwyer and the men entered the kitchen. 'Does Jerry Dwyer live here?' they asked. She asked what they wanted him for and was ordered to put up her hands. The men then grappled with Frank, who had come out of his room partly dressed and brought him outside the door, where they shot him. Some of the party remained in the kitchen while Frank was being murdered in the yard and entering Ned's bedroom, which he shared with Frank, dragged him into the yard in his shirt and shot him. One of the men said: 'There's three of them; where is the other?' Jerry was in his parents' bedroom. His mother stood close to the door and when they looked in they saw her. One of them said: 'There is only a woman in that room.

They fired some shots through the door and the wooden partition into the room and then left."

Two months before the Dwyer murders the Archbishop of Cashel had written an indictment of the British Government, in which he declared:

"The officials of this government have murdered with impunity old and young in the Archdiocese of Cashel. They have wrecked towns, villages and peaceful homes. They have destroyed creameries, and have been guilty of many robberies

And be it noted that this terror campaign against the civil population of Ireland was backed to the hilt in the British Parliament by the Premier, Lloyd George; by the Chief Secretary, Sir Hamar Greenwood, and by the great Winston Churchill himself.

In another splendid article in the *Capuchin Annual*, "Aspects of English Rule in Ireland," the historian, Oliver Snoddy, M.A., has this commentary to make on the official reign of terror to which the Irish people were subjected in 1920 and 1921:

"It is doubtful if any other civilized people endured such calculated oppression in a reign of terror carved out by the crown forces of another civilized country as Ireland did at the end of the second decade of the present century."

These were the same ruthless Crown forces against whom courageous men like Dan Breen fought for the right of Irishmen to be masters in their own land.



Among those who were entertained in the hall of the Intercontinental Hotel were: Mrs. Jackie Green, Mrs. Michael Murphy, Mrs. Frank, Mrs. Terry, and Mrs. Colmcille.

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