

LIFE AND POEMS  
OF  
MICHAEL SCANLAN  
THE FENIAN POET

WITH  
A  
MEMOIR ON THE LIFE OF  
CAPTAIN JOHN GUIRY  
FENIAN ORGANISER

AR NA GCUR IN EAGAR  
AG  
MÍCHEÁL DE BÚRCA

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MICHEÁL DE BÚRCA.

*Aughalin.  
September, 1969.*

## MICHAEL SCANLAN THE FENIAN POET

Where the Green ivied ruins fling out their dark shadows  
Like a sigh from the soul for the days that are gone;  
And the Deel ripples softly along the green meadows,  
Far away in the village of Castlemahon.

In this village of Castlemahon in the house now occupied by John Collum Michael Scanlan, the Poet Laureate of Fenianism, first saw the light of day on November 10th, 1833. Son of Mortimer or Morty Scanlon, shopkeeper and farmer, and of Kate Roche, of Castlemahon Mills. The family was large (six) and Morty eked out their meagre income by doing some carting of butter and other farm produce to Cork, but being of a wild and reckless nature and rather fond of the "drop" things went from bad to worse for the family.

Added to this, disease struck and two of the girls died of cholera which struck the district in the late 1840s, a result of the widespread famine in the country which, however, did not seriously affect the Castlemahon district. These two girls were in fact the only known casualties in the district and were interred secretly at night in the interior of the St. Nicholas's Abbey in the village.

Michael was sent to school in Castlemahon village, taught by Daniel O'Callaghan, then already known as one of the best teachers in Munster and to whom students flocked from far and wide, some of whom in later life filled the highest positions in the gift of the British Government.

In spite of the little farm at Mahoonagh Beg, the shop and the carting things had come to such a pass before 1850 that Morty and Kate decided to take the remaining members of the family to the greater Ireland beyond the seas and made arrangements to emigrate to the then mecca of all Castlemahon people—Chicago, Illinois, which today holds more descendants of Castlemahon people than does the parish itself. With them also travelled the Corbett family of Cooliska—Morty's daughter and son-in-law. These latter left the lands now owned by the Geary family but then rackrented and useless after the Famine years.

The fifteen-year-old Michael took with him more than the average share of book-learning acquired from Daniel O'Callaghan and also a vast amount of Gaelic Lore and Legend which he obtained at the firesides of the neighbours in Castlemahon. He also carried a burning hate of England and things English and a desire some day to strike a blow for his native land. He sings:—

Up for the cause, then, fling forth the green banners,  
From the East to the West, from the South to the North,  
Irish land, Irish men, Irish tongue, Irish manners,  
From the cot and the mansion let the slogan go forth.

In America Michael Scanlan first earned his living as a shoemaker, next he opened a saw-mill, later he became an assistant in a grocery store, but his restless spirit still longed for something more. He had the poet's disdain for worldly wealth and might be classed as one of life's failures. At last his more practical brothers, John and Mortimer, took him into partnership in a candy factory and this venture became a huge success and the largest factory of its kind in the mid-West. The firm of Scanlan Brothers was, in fact, the first to ship candy west of the Mississippi. Yet this success did not dim his love or his longing for his homeland or drown his thoughts of his native village:

"For love is showing the mountains grand  
The glens and meadows  
In light and shadows  
And the pleasant valleys of our native land."

The desire to work or do something for Ireland was always uppermost in his mind and in that of his brother's, and in due course each was drawn to the new movement then gaining momentum in the United States—The Fenian Brotherhood—and one by one they became members of the Chicago Circle and began for each of them a lifetime of service for Ireland.

"Some left her shores long years ago  
Some never saw her hills;  
But for her glory and her woe  
Each faithful bosom thrills."

Michael Scanlan became a prominent official in the Fenian Circle and worked hard to organise the Brotherhood in Chicago. His militant disposition, however, led him to support the splinter group which supported one Colonel William Roberts and broke away from the main organisation led by Colonel John O'Mahony. Colonel Roberts' section of the Brotherhood was governed by a Senate of which Scanlan was a member. The main aim of Roberts' organisation was to compel England to relinquish her hold on Ireland by attacking the outposts of the Empire and holding them and many American Fenians believed in the practicability of attacking Canada and holding it in lieu of Ireland. Their enthusiasm was such that a great fair was held in Chicago to provide the necessary funds for the venture. Fenian Bonds were issued, many

of them signed by Michael Scanlan, and it is related that 1,500 men drilled in the great quarries near Chicago under Colonel James Quirke (a West Limerick man). Arms and ammunition for the venture were purchased from the United States Government with its knowledge and connivance from the surplus material left over from the Civil War. Roberts and those with him were completely misled by the sympathy expressed by American officials for their project and were totally unprepared for the seizure of the arms and ammunition by American Army and Police units. Alas! they had been used as dupes by clever politicians to further their own ends. Before the seizure, however, Colonel John O'Neill with 400 Fenians had marched for Canada, crossed the border and defeated at Ridgeway two regiments of Canadian Volunteers—one the Queen's Own—one of the finest regiments in Canada. The alarm caused by this Fenian attack, small as it was, caused the British Government to settle its differences with the United States, whose army promptly closed the border between itself and Canada.

Disappointed and disillusioned by this failure and the failure of the Rising of '67, Scanlan did not lose heart. With some other Irish-Americans he founded, in May, 1867, a paper—*The Irish Republic*—of which he himself was the Editor and contributed many of the articles which were of a very high literary merit. *The Irish Republic* openly preached rebellion and physical force.

"Let cowards bend in abject prayer,  
Let tyrants frown and threat,  
Be ours the duty to prepare  
With sword and bayonet."

*The Irish Republic* soon came into conflict with John O'Mahony's "Gaelic American" and the feud was long and bitter. However, *The Irish Republic* ceased publication in 1873, leaving Michael Scanlan again in poor circumstances as his work for Irish freedom had caused him to neglect his business in the candy trade and he had to take a position in the State Department in Washington.

Here again Scanlan's ability was soon evident and in a few years he had achieved the rank of Chief of the Bureau of Statistics in the Department. In this position he did very valuable work for his adopted country by devising and putting into operation a system by which the American Consuls in every country would send reports to his Bureau as to markets available for American products in these countries. This information was passed on to American businessmen and as a result the foreign trade of the United States was substantially increased to the detriment of British trade, a result entirely satisfying to Michael Scanlan.

The British soon realised what was happening and used all their social and diplomatic influence to discredit Scanlan, the Bureau

Chief, and at one period succeeded in having him temporarily demoted. Scanlan's work was, however, appreciated by the United States Government and he was commended by the Secretary for State, James G. Blaine, and by the man who was afterwards one of America's greatest Presidents, William McKinley.

For thirty-seven years Scanlan loyally and efficiently served the country of his exile and in 1912 retired with honour from his position. His remaining years were spent in Chicago and were given to his writings and poetry which he prepared for publication but which, alas, never saw the light. His book of poems "Love and Land", was published in 1869 and is the one surviving work we have of one who was known to be a prolific writer and a poet of repute. He died on March 6th, 1917, in the Hospital of St. Mary of Nazareth in Chicago after a very short illness and is buried in Calvary Cemetery far from the land to which he had given his life's service and which he had loved so well. He died on the fiftieth anniversary of the day when the men of his native county of Limerick—The Kilmallock Fenians—had risen and fought and died for the ideals he had ever advocated and on the threshold of another uprising which would see these ideals partly brought to fruition.

"Sons of old Ireland now  
 Love you your sireland now.  
 Come from the kirk or the chapel or glen,  
 Down with all factions old,  
 Concert and action bold;  
 That is the creed of the Bold Fenian men."

## OBITUARY NOTICE OF MICHAEL SCANLAN

From the Gaelic American, March 29th, 1917.

Michael Scanlan, whose death in his eighty-fourth year, in the hospital of St. Mary of Nazareth, Chicago, was announced in last week's Gaelic American, left a record of many years' service to Ireland, both as a patriot and poet. He was born in Castlemahon, Co. Limerick, on November 10, 1833 and came to the United States in 1848. His mind was filled with a knowledge of the history, folklore, poetry and traditions of his native land, and, much of what he knew of those things has found expression in the fine and varied collection of verse which he has left behind, and which he finished compiling and revising before his death.

Michael Scanlan may truthfully be called the Poet Laureate of Fenianism and of the Fenian movement. His "Bold Fenian Men" was known practically in every Irish home both in Ireland and America.

Michael Scanlan settled in Chicago sixty-five years ago. He and his brothers were for years in the candy manufacturing business. Their firm was the largest of its kind then in the west. In 1867, inspired by his desire to help his native land, and because of his well-known literary ability and his activity and prominence in the Fenian Brotherhood, he became editor of the 'Irish Republic,' which as its name indicated, advocated the complete severance of the ties binding Ireland to England.

In 1887 Mr. Scanlan was appointed Chief of the Bureau of Statistics in the Department of State in Washington. (He had been a clerk in the Bureau for some years previous to that time). It was he who inaugurated the system of monthly reports by American Consuls as to trade opportunities in foreign countries to which they were assigned. These reports were distributed among merchants and manufacturers and helped very materially to increase the foreign trade of the United States.

About five years ago, Mr. Scanlan retired from his official position in Washington and spent his time since then with his family and his books.

Michael Scanlan is survived by his son, Judge Kickham Scanlan of Chicago, and by two daughters Erin Scanlan and Mrs. John Fleming. Two brothers John F. and Mortimer, also survive him."

Notice taken from the "Chicago Tribune" March 7th, 1917:

Scanlan, Michael. Born in Castlemahon, County Limerick, Ireland, Nov. 19, 1833, died March 6, 1917, father of Erin and Kickham Scanlan, Planxy Fleming and the late Catherine Young and Oona Sampson, brother of Mortimer, John F. and the late Patrick Edward, Timothy Scanlan, Mrs. Mary Mc-Quaide, and Mrs. Catherine Sullivan. Funeral from residence of his daughter Mrs. James P. Fleming, 2623, North Sacramento Ave., Friday, March 9th 1917, at 9:30 a.m. to St. Sylvester's Church; autos to Calvary. Kindly omit flowers.

## MEMOIR OF CAPTAIN JOHN GUIRY *Fenian Organiser*

John Guiry was born in 1837 in the townland of Shanrath and during the Famine period the family was dispossessed of their holding there. They did what hundreds of thousands of Irish families did in those terrible years—took up the emigrant ship and the young lad at the age of twelve found a new home in Kentucky, U.S.A.

At twenty-three (1860) he joined the Confederate Army and served under General Stonewall Jackson until General Lee's surrender at Richmond.

During those years of Civil War he met many brother-Irishmen and his mind like those became filled with a desire to strike a blow for his native land. Gradually he found himself drawn to the Fenian Brotherhood in America and like many another Irish Officer of both Federal and Confederate Armies was sent to Ireland to assist in the military training of the Fenians. In this he was one with Captain Mackay, Kelly Deasy, Lomasney and others.

He made his headquarters at Dowlings in Shanrath who were relatives of his and began the work of Fenian training in Castlemahon and the surrounding parishes.

He was soon a marked man with the police and his activities suspect. One market day he came to Newcastle on business and soon noticed that he was being followed everywhere by an R.I.C. man, Head Constable Bristone. He went into Patrick Roche's of Bridge Street (now McCoy's) and remained for a considerable time, but when he was about to leave found the R.I.C. man still there. He (Captain Guiry) walked past the Bridge and proceeded in the direction of home, the Head Constable following close behind. At last he drew so close that Captain Guiry twice warned him to "stand back" and as he still advanced drew his heavy Colt pistol and fired deliberately at his thighs. He had no wish to kill the man. The Head Constable fell and Captain Guiry quickly left the town behind. At Rathnaneane he left the road and proceeded towards Killealine where he hid for some time in haystacks, where McCloy's now live.

Soon the "hue and cry" was out and as soldiers were then quartered in The Square, Newcastle, raids were quickly made on his known haunts. Dowling's was raided and Guiry's, of Ardnacrohy, and Hartnett's of Glenduff, where in fact Guiry then was. He was saved by the presence of mind of Mrs. Hartnett, who had concealed him in a poultry house on the roof of which the searchers actually stood. By now West Limerick was being combed for the fugitive by soldiers and police, but Mrs. Hartnett succeeded in transferring him secretly to the home of Revd. Fr. Walsh, of Glantine, who was

known for his Fenian sympathies. Fr. Walsh kept him for some time and then took him to Fr. Nolan, of Ardagh, who provided a safe hiding place for him at Ahern's of Glensharrold. Here he remained until the Fenians made plans for his escape. Fr. Nolan provided him with a suit of clerical clothes and as all southern ports were closely watched he was taken to Dublin and sailed from thence to Glasgow in a ship, the crew of which were mostly Fenians. From Glasgow, still disguised as a priest, he had little difficulty in getting to the U.S.A.

In the summer of 1924 he visited his native land. The "Observer" of that time (Editor, Seán Brouder) gave an account of the happenings of over fifty years before, which had helped greatly in compiling the above.

Two years later John Guiry, Soldier and Fenian, passed away in his Kentucky home, another of those who in dark and evil days endeavoured to strike a blow for Róisín Dubh.

Let us in his native place endeavour to keep his memory green.

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#### SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF CASTLEMAHON HISTORY

- 1278 A.D. Geoffrey de Marisco gave land in Waterford in exchange for the Tuath of Maccaveni (Mahoonagh).
- 1288 A.D. Lands granted to Thomas de Clare and called the Manor of Moyavenach, and
- 1295 A.D. Gilbert de Clare married Ellen, daughter of MacCarthy, and had two sons, Maurice and Gilbert, or Gibbon as he was known to the Irish who became the ancestor of the Fitzgibbons.
- 1302 A.D. Principal Norman families in district Capella, Lee, Fitzjohn and Fitzmaurice; Irish families, Caseys, Corkerys and Lehanes.
- 1489 A.D. John Fitzgibbon of Mahoonagh successfully ambushed and killed the Earl of Desmond at Rathkeale.
- 1589 A.D. Lands of Mahoonagh granted to Henry Oughtred of Devonshire, later passing to the Courtenays.
- 1598 Mahoonagh Castle was besieged by Thomas MacGibbon and captured with the help of his servant Casey who was in the castle at the time.
- 1659 A.D. District had 552 Irish and 10 English landholders.
- 1643 A.D. Fr. Robert Ruddell appointed by the Pope as first known pastor of Mahoonagh.
- 1642 A.D. Thomas McGibbon of Mahoonagh attacked Newcastle and burnt the town. At Grange, Captain John Southwell was attacked by McGibbon and killed.
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## MAHOONAGH N.S., 1878-1968

The first school in Mahoonagh was in the village and was run by the O'Callaghan family, Daniel and Michael. On the erection of the new school Michael O'Callaghan was made principal with Maurice Ahern as Assistant. The school soon earned a high reputation and pupils came from all parts of West Limerick to study there, some walking fourteen and sixteen miles per day to attend. Michael O'Callaghan was succeeded by George O'Callaghan who was President of the I.N.T.O. and leader of the teachers in their fight in the Mansfield case. His assistant was Patrick Howard up to the time of his retiral and he was succeeded by James Grogan of Broadford who introduced the teaching of Irish as an extra in the school. James Grogan was in turn succeeded by James O'Kelly, later principal of Croagh N.S. On George O'Callaghan's retiral in 1925 he was succeeded by Edmond Hayes, who was principal until his death, with James Conway as assistant. Edmond Hayes was succeeded by the present principal, Daniel Nash, James Conway having in the meantime become principal in Feaghana. The present assistant is Michael Hayes, son of the former principal.

In the Girls' School the first principal was Maria Kenny, with her assistant, Nancy Stokes. Miss Kenny was succeeded by Mary Hickey (later Mrs. John Cussen) and there was then no assistant. Mrs. Cussen was succeeded in 1921 by Miss Breghid Harrot who had as assistant Miss Lena Leahy who later transferred to Tournafulla, being succeeded by Miss Nancy Kennedy. On Miss Harrot's retiral, in 1961, Miss Kennedy (now Mrs. Kennedy) was made principal and her assistant was Miss Kathleen Raleigh.

In 1968 the new school was built and in accordance with Government policy both Boys' and Girls' Schools were amalgamated with the existing staffs as above.

*Some Poems by Michael Scanlan*


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Address to Columbia

The Irish Soldier

The Manchester Martyrs

A Prison Love Song

A Christmas Chant

The Fenian Men

Autumn Leaves

Castlemahon

Our Native Land

Conor and Mona

Terry of Derry

Dear Old Ireland

Limerick is beautiful

Nora of Cahirciveen

When you were young

The Flag of Green

We'll sing of thee, dear Ireland

Garryowen

Jackets Green

Any of the above songs not included in this Booklet will be much appreciated by the Committee.



*Some of Michael Scanlan's best known songs*

### CASTLEMAHON

1

Oh! for an hour 'mongst the red blossomed clover  
 And my day dreams restored in their freshness to me;  
 To the green fields and the wide valleys over,  
 With a footstep so light and a spirit so free.  
 Where the green ivied ruins fling out their dark shadows  
 Like a sigh from the soul for the days that are gone;  
 And the Deel ripples softly along the green meadows,  
 Far away in the village of Castlemahon.

2

How often in soul, I go down to that river,  
 And gaze in its depths 'til my senses grow dim;  
 I touch its pure lips, and can feel my soul quiver,  
 As I catch the green rushes that grow on its brim.  
 'Tis the fountain of youth, as I feel its embraces,  
 The long years of exile are over and gone;  
 And 'midst its depths smiling I see the clear faces  
 That shone round my boyhood in Castlemahon.

3

How bright are the stars of my infancy glowing,  
 How green are the hills where in boyhood we roamed.  
 The streams like our youth full of purity flowing  
 The distant blue hills and the haunts that we loved.  
 Like a dream of lost Eden, their beauty still shining,  
 We gaze on their glory, but fate whips us on;  
 O'er the wild sea of life with our hearts ever pining  
 For the spirits' lost home in Castlemahon.

4

No more does the voice of the sweet village maiden  
 Fall soft on the heart like the birds' thrilling songs;  
 But sad on the ear comes the night wind o'er laden  
 With the soul-rending keen round heavy-hearted  
 Yes, grief, bent and stricken moves round heavy-hearted  
 To see loved ones vanish away one by one;  
 The old to the grave and the young all departed,  
 Their names scarce remembered in Castlemahon.

5

All are gone from the land. Some for freedom  
 On the red field of war and the wide flowing sea;  
 Poured out their brave spirits, their latest breath sending  
 A sigh on the wings of the battle to thee.  
 And many went out on the dark sea of shadows  
 From the jail to the rest-house of Miny-le-bon;  
 But all heard the Deel singing to the green meadows  
 Far away by the village of Castlemahon.

6

Each night in my sleep the white moonbeams are flinging  
 Their light o'er the river, the bridge and the mill;  
 I can hear the clear tones of the village maids singing,  
 I catch every note and I feel every thrill.  
 Then a demon leaps out with a wild cry of danger  
 And the river, the bridge and the moonbeams are gone;  
 I awake from my dreams in the land of the stranger  
 Far away from the village of Castlemahon.

### GOODBYE

1

The apple boughs were dripping dew  
 On my pathway;  
 The robin sang the meadows through  
 His plaintive lay.  
 The valleys never looked so sweet  
 As on that day,  
 When from my childhood's blest retreat  
 I turned away,  
 To breast the wild and searching sleet  
 That sweeps the world's highway.

2

I turned upon the mountain heath  
 To look my last,  
 And gazing o'er the vales beneath  
 My tears fell fast.  
 Bright eyes that sparkled long ago  
 Rose soft in view;  
 Sweet voices floated from below  
 That once I knew,  
 Were but the echoes of my woe  
 From 'neath the churchyard yew.

3

How fast the stern and rock-ribbed coast  
 Fades from my sight,  
 Soon, soon, the green hills will be lost  
 In endless night.  
 The moon will rise on wings of gold  
 And the sad sea  
 Unto the hills will sing her old  
 Weird melody.  
 Yet I shall never more behold  
 Thy beauties Gra mo Chroí.

## LIBERTY

1

We'll sing of the sunny meadows  
 And we'll sing of the flowing streams,  
 Of the glens that sleep in shadows  
 That haunt us in our dreams;  
 Of the dancing rills and the high green hills  
 And the fields we ne'er may see.  
 Then here's to the fields of Ireland  
 With a hearty three times three.

2

We'll sing of the great departed  
 And the valleys where they lie;  
 The brave and the fearless hearted  
 Who taught men how to die.  
 And every man of every clan  
 Will guard his memory,  
 Who died on the green hills fighting  
 For Ireland's liberty.

3

Let your voices ring out cheering  
 And drain your goblets dry;  
 To the men who died for Erin  
 And to those who yet will die.  
 'Side prison bars or 'neath the stars  
 In camp or garden gay,  
 We'll sing of thee, Gra Geal mo Chroí  
 Three thousand miles away.

## LIMERICK IS BEAUTIFUL

1

Oh, Limerick is beautiful  
 As everybody knows,  
 And by that city of my heart  
 How proud old Shannon flows;  
 It sweeps down by the brave old town  
 As pure in depth and tone,  
 As when Sarsfield swept the Saxons from  
 The walls of Garryowen.

2

'Tis not for Limerick that I sigh—  
 Though I love her in my soul;  
 Though times will change and friends will die  
 And man will not control;  
 No, not for friends long passed away  
 Or days for ever flown,  
 But that the maiden I adore  
 Is sad in Garryowen.

3

Oh, she I love is beautiful  
 And world-wide is her fame,  
 She dwells down by the rushing tide  
 And Eire is her name.  
 And dearer than my very life  
 Her glances are to me  
 The light that guides my weary soul  
 Across life's stormy sea.

4

I loved her in my boyhood  
 And now in manhood's noon  
 The vision of my life is still  
 To dry thy tears, Aroon.  
 I'd sing unto the tomb, or dance  
 Beneath the gallows tree,  
 To see her on the hills once more  
 Proud, passionate and free.

## THE JACKETS GREEN

When I was a maiden fair and young,  
 On the pleasant banks of Lee,  
 No bird that in that greenwood sung  
 Was half so blithe and free.  
 My heart ne'er beat with flying feet,  
 No love sang me his queen,  
 Till down the glen rode Sarsfield's men,  
 And they wore the jackets green.

Young Donal sat on his gallant grey  
 Like a king on a royal seat,  
 And my heart leaped out on his regal way,  
 To worship at his feet.  
 Oh! love, had you come in those colours dressed,  
 And wooed with a soldier's mien,  
 I'd have laid my head on your throbbing breast,  
 For the sake of your jacket green.

No hoarded wealth did my love own,  
 Save the good sword that he bore:  
 But I loved him for himself alone,  
 And the colour bright he wore.  
 For had he come in England's red,  
 To make me England's queen,  
 I'd rove the high green hills instead,  
 For the sake of the Irish green.

When William stormed with shot and shell,  
 At the walls of Garryowen,  
 In the breach of death my Donal fell,  
 And he sleeps near the Treaty Stone.  
 That breach the foemen never crossed,  
 While he swung his broad sword keen;  
 But I do no weep my darling lost,  
 For he fell in his jacket green.

When Sarsfield sailed away I wept  
 As I heard the wild ochone.  
 I felt, then, dead as the men who slept  
 'Neath the fields of Garryown.  
 While Ireland held my Donal blessed,  
 No wild sea rolled between,  
 Till I would fold him to my breast  
 All robed in his Irish green.

My soul has sobbed like the waves of woe,  
 That sad o'er tombstone break,  
 For I buried my heart in his grave below,  
 For his and for Ireland's sake.  
 And I cry: "Make way for the soldier's bride  
 In your halls of death, sad queen,"  
 For I long to rest by my true love's side,  
 And wrapped in the folds of green.

I saw the Shannon's purple tide  
 Roll by the Irish Town,  
 As I stood in the breach by Donal's side,  
 When England's flag went down.  
 And now it glowers as it seeks the skies,  
 Like a blood-red curse between.  
 I weep, but 'tis not women's sighs  
 Will raise the Irish Green.

Oh! Ireland, sad is thy lonely soul,  
 And loud beats the winter sea,  
 But sadder and higher the wild waves roll  
 From the hearts that break for thee.  
 Yet grief shall come to our heartless foes,  
 And their thrones in the dust be seen,  
 So, Irish maids, love none but those  
 Who wear the jackets green.