

**FATHER  
MICHAEL O'FLANAGAN  
REPUBLICAN PRIEST**

*"The staunchest priest who ever lived in Ireland"*

—CATHAL BRUGHA.



**THE STORY OF HIS LIFE WITH  
EXTRACTS FROM HIS SPEECHES**

BY

**DESMOND GREAVES**

(Editor, Irish Democrat)



**9d.**



**A CONNOLLY ASSOCIATION PAMPHLET**

## INTRODUCTION

**W**HEN Father Michael O'Flanagan came into the office of the Connolly Association in 1939 and saw a group of unemployed workers struggling against limitations of space and finance he was deeply moved.

"Ye are doing the work of the humble Nazarene," he said, and thereupon became an honorary member of the Association.

What sort of a man was this Catholic priest whose record of struggle on behalf of the Irish people has become something legendary?

This little pamphlet, published by the Connolly Association twelve years after his death, at a time when even those once closely associated with him seem to want to forget about him, tells the story of Ireland's greatest Republican priest—the man who won turf rights for the peasants of Sligo; the man who performed the simple service at the opening of the revolutionary Dail Eireann; the man who held firmly to his republican principles until he died in comparative obscurity in 1942.

It is not a biography. That must come from those who have the material he left behind him. Its purpose is to explain to Irishmen and especially the younger generation how great events produce great men, and to encourage them to act boldly according to their consciences at all times.

**I wish to Join the CONNOLLY ASSOCIATION**

**Subscription : 2/6 a year**

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# Father Michael O'Flanagan

## REPUBLICAN PRIEST

### EARLY LIFE

**T**HE staunchest priest who ever lived in Ireland"—such was Cathal Brugha's description of Father Michael O'Flanagan, who was born of farming stock at Cloontower, near Castlerea, Co. Roscommon, in 1876.

**A true son of the people, Father O'Flanagan as a boy attended Cloonbonive National School. His abilities attracted such marked notice that he was then sent to the Diocesan College at Summerhill, Co. Sligo, after which in 1894 he entered Maynooth.**

Ordained in Sligo Cathedral in 1900, he returned to Summerhill College as a Professor and taught there for four years.

At Maynooth he had formed friendships with Archbishop Mannix and Dr. O'Hickey, the Gaelic pioneer, and it is here that his enthusiasm for the Irish language was first roused.

Every effort had been made by the British authorities to stamp out Irish. Only gradually did the early enthusiasts of the revival win it even a grudging admission, and they were seriously hampered by the lack of grammars and books about the language. British educationists had expected Irish to die out and had therefore deliberately refused to study it.

Because its sound and structure were different from English, its scientific teaching was important, but in those days non-existent.

Realising this from his own experience at Summerhill, Father O'Flanagan set to work to write a scientific account of the sounds in Irish, which was one of the first to explain the rules of aspiration and eclipsis in terms of the anatomy of the vocal organs, and thus he made a great contribution to the language movement which should never be forgotten.

### THE U.S.A. AND ROME

**I**N 1904 he left Summerhill. He was sent by his Bishop to the U.S.A. on a mission of raising funds to defray the debt on Loughlyn Convent, and on this mission he toured America till 1910. In the latter period he acted in addition as the special envoy to the U.S.A. of the Gaelic League. He thus met all the prominent personalities of the Irish-Ireland movement in the U.S.A., and the contacts he made then were of great value to him afterwards. In 1912 and again in 1914 there fell to him the coveted honour of being Advent preacher in St. Sylvester's at Rome, a fact which testifies beyond all else to his powers as a preacher.

## BACK IN IRELAND

HE did not become involved in politics in the usually accepted sense of the word until he had returned to Ireland, towards the end of 1914, when he became curate at Cliffoney, Co. Sligo.

World War I had broken out, and the immediate result was hardship for the people of Western Ireland. Much of the land was still in the hands of big landlords and cattle ranchers, and 1914 had seen many a cattle drive, in Ballintogher, Dromahaire and elsewhere.

"The road for the bullocks, and the land for the people" was the cry—which Redmond's United Irish League, which then had a branch in every village, did its best to stifle—that same U.I.L. that first opposed the volunteers, then prevailed on employers to give men time off to drill, and then, supporting the 1914 war, tried to get Irishmen who had banded themselves together to defend Ireland's liberties to go abroad and fight for British Imperialism in the fields of Flanders.

War meant the calling up of reservists, and since few families were without a breadwinner who had at some time "taken the shilling," the call-up disastrously reduced incomes for thousands of families.

**In Sligo Town the tenants league, backed up by the Trades Council and Labour Party, combined to demand that landlords should remit or reduce rents to families whose wage-earners had been called up. In country districts there was less organisation and so more hardship.**

On the other hand, the scarcities of war meant profit-making opportunities to many people, such as cattle-dealers, big farmers and traders, and this is why the United Irish League supported Redmond's pledge to the British Government. War was good business, and the sections who found it so were very willing to believe the propaganda that "Catholic Belgium" had been invaded by Germany and even to persuade some of the clergy who were close to them to proclaim that it was a Catholic duty to support the war. For some time many people thought that this was so.

### THE CLIFFONEY TURBARY

QUITE often events small in themselves show people how they stand. The authorities began to use the emergency of war to make inroads on the rights of the people, and one example took place at Cliffoney, where the Congested Districts Board announced that turf banks which had been available to the Cliffoney people for generations were to be reserved for its own tenants.

It was then that Father O'Flanagan showed that he had not forgotten he had sprung from the people. He conducted a long correspondence with the bureaucrats of the C.D.B. without success. Many a man would then have regarded his duty as done



and told the people they had no choice but to submit. Not so Father O'Flanagan.

On 29th June, 1915, he asked his congregation to wait outside the chapel after Mass, where he addressed them as follows:—

"The people are sick of promises," he said. "What I advise the people to do is for every man who wants a turf bank and can work a turf spade to go to the waste bog to-morrow and cut plenty of turf. You need not be in the least afraid. God put the bog there for the use of the people and if you are not as well fortified as if you were in a German trench, you will be a formidable opponent enough if anybody chances to come along and interfere with you.

**"I'll go myself, and if anybody has a spare turf spade I'll show you that I can cut turf too.**

"Have we been quiet too long? Are we going to let poor little children shiver to death with cold next winter for want of a fire? I think if we start to-morrow morning at nine o'clock it would be a good thing."

**N**EXT morning 160 people assembled outside Cliffoney chapel and marched from Father O'Flanagan's house to the bog. They cut 12,000 cubic feet of turf every day till August 16th, when the C.D.B. secured an injunction to restrain them from continuing. By the time the matter came up in the Chancery Division of the High Court, and some trifling sentences were imposed, the turf was saved and next year the turbary rights were restored. It was shortly after this that Fr. O'Flanagan was transferred to Crossna. But there he defended the rights of the people in the same vigorous way, not merely by his able advocacy but by urging them to assert them for themselves.

During his period at Crossna, Fr. O'Flanagan was in increasing demand as a speaker at Nationalist gatherings. His speech at the lying-in-state of O'Donovan Rossa in Dublin rivalled in eloquence that delivered at the graveside by Patrick Pearse, the following day. In America he had become a close friend of the Rossa family and he accompanied the family to Glasnevin, and officiated at the graveside.

During November of the same year (1915) he delivered the oration at the Manchester Martyrs Commemoration at Belfast, where twelve months previously he had spoken for the Gaelic League as a leading Gaelic language enthusiast. This occasion is said to have seen one of the greatest Nationalist demonstrations in living memory.

### THE RISING

**T**HROUGHOUT late 1915 and early 1916, Irish public opinion, though still confused and uncertain, steadily moved away from Redmond and the war-supporters. The story of how Connolly and

Pearse led the first National uprising in the world against the war in Easter week, 1916, is known to all Irishmen, and most progressive English people.

The reprisals taken by British imperialism were criminal and frightful. Not only were the finest men in Ireland taken out and shot, but people like Arthur Griffith, who had not had any close connection with the Rising, were arrested and interned. Trade unionists like William O'Brien were incarcerated for no reason—except the good old Imperialist reason of making things as difficult as possible for every progressive movement in Ireland.

**It was in these circumstances that the priest of Crossna, who had not been afraid to take the risk of leading his own parishioners, entered boldly into politics, with the object of drawing together the broken strands of the National movement.**

It is doubtful if anybody but he could have done so at the time, and his action showed his high sense of responsibility and love of the people. Thanks to him the British Imperialists who thought that by killing Connolly the thinker and Pearse the visionary they had killed the Irish revolution, learned their error much more quickly than they otherwise would have done.

#### ROSCOMMON ELECTION

**T**HEIR first shock was the famous Roscommon by-election. Despite his great reputation as a scholar, Count Plunkett had suffered the indignity of having his name removed from the membership roll of the Royal Dublin Society, merely because his son (Joseph Plunkett) took a leading part in the Rising, for which he had been murdered with the other leaders.

The advanced Nationalists decided to put up a candidate to contest Roscommon against the pro-war Redmondites, and chose Count Plunkett. Father O'Flanagan's dynamic energy in organising that campaign must have been one of the principal reasons for Plunkett's overwhelming victory. Father O'Flanagan stated his policy simply. It was:—

**"To proclaim that the freedom to be accorded to Ireland must be the same as that of Belgium, Serbia, Bohemia, Rumania, France and Germany."**

The campaign took place in one of the bitterest wintry spells of the twentieth century. Arthur Griffith, just out of jail, offered £150 which he had obtained to restart "Nationality" but his offer was not accepted; Father O'Flanagan managed to borrow £400 which was painfully paid back over the following year. By refusing Griffith's offer he proclaimed himself a man of the left wing in Republican politics, and showed a keen insight into Griffith's character. Griffith was to sign the "Treaty" five years later.



## UNITY CONFERENCE

THEN came a new turn of events. With the intention of impressing the U.S.A. with Britain's democratic intentions, Lloyd George released the republican prisoners. But at first there was no unity of purpose between the various opinions and groups. The old leaders were dead; the young not yet established. The story of his efforts to secure unity was told many years afterwards by Father O'Flanagan himself in his pamphlet, "Strength in Sinn Fein," at a time when subsequent splits had somewhat dispirited him with the results of his work in 1917. Posterity judges it less modestly than he did himself. The "Irish Press" wrote:—

**"It was mainly through his influence at, and after the Plunkett Convention in 1917, that the union of Arthur Griffith's Sinn Fein with the Republican movement that had inspired the rising was brought about."**

The new M.P. had called the conference and it received very wide support. But it was clear from the first that there would be difficulty in securing unity of action between Griffith's Sinn Fein which favoured a "Dual Monarchy" and the Republicans who wanted complete independence. The fact that those executed in 1916 were the best and most experienced of their leaders placed the Republicans at a disadvantage, and Arthur Griffith tried at every point to drive a shrewd bargain—and after having driven it seldom kept his side of it.

Arthur Griffith refused to accept the amalgamation of his non-Republican "Sinn Fein" party with the Republican "Liberty Clubs" unless the new organisation accepted the name of Sinn Fein, took over for a provisional period the constitution of Sinn Fein, and accepted the chairman of Sinn Fein and gave Sinn Fein what was, in effect, a privileged position on the new committee. The terms were agreed upon except for the last, but Father O'Flanagan, who became vice-chairman, afterwards complained bitterly of Arthur Griffith's high-handed behaviour, and added that the split in the National camp, which became clear in 1922, was there all the time. People with different policies were trying to work within one party, rather than having two separate parties which could none the less co-operate on matters of mutual interest. The present Sinn Fein is more in the spirit of Father O'Flanagan than of Arthur Griffith and the name always had a different meaning to the two sections.

## RESURGENCE

DESPITE the internal differences, the Plunkett Convention did revive the National movement, and the new organisations set about preparing to oust the Redmondites from their positions. Of the mistakes which were made at this period, and which gave

an undue prominence to the Arthur Griffith wing, Fr. O'Flanagan wrote:—

**"The Irish people are not infallible . . . they are quite capable of making mistakes. But the mistakes which the people make do not as a rule originate with the people. The political mistakes which have been made in Ireland did not begin amongst the people. They began amongst the leaders of the people."**

Among the tricks which the Arthur Griffith wing played was the calling for a hurried sectional meeting in the midst of the 1918 election so as to come to an agreement with the semi-defunct Redmondite party, which Father O'Flanagan believed did not do justice to Sinn Fein.

**F**ATHER O'FLANAGAN played a great part in the anti-conscription campaign of 1918 which closed down every shop and every industry outside the Belfast area on April 24th, and soon forced the British Government to climb down. They utterly failed to impose conscription on Ireland.

In May, 1918, he made a speech to over ten thousand people in the small town of Ballyjamesduff, but since the censor forbade the publication of even a single word of it in the Press, it had to be printed privately as a pamphlet. In the speech Father O'Flanagan said:—

**"They cannot calumniate us to-day by calling us pro-Irish, and therefore they do it by calling us pro-German. The quarrel between Germany and England is a quarrel about trade, about coalmines, about command of traffic routes. . . . In a few years these Royal cousins who rule England and Germany will come together and clink their champagne glasses over the graves of millions of the flower of the manhood of Germany and England.**

**"But the quarrel between Ireland and England will go on until Ireland is completely separated from England under that beautiful tricolour flag of the Irish Republic."**

**"All this hatred,"** Father O'Flanagan continued, **"that is supposed to fill the breasts of the English and the French against the Germans, and the Germans against the English and the French, is largely a manufactured hatred—a hatred that is built up by lying newspapers and lying Ministers, who sit in their offices in London and other capitals of Europe, and play with the lives of men by the million. These men are in no danger themselves but they coolly talk of an offensive, and that offensive will probably cost 150,000 or 200,000 lives. With the stroke of a pencil or with some wild speech or some wild sentence about a knock-out blow, they blot out the lives of hundreds of thousands of fathers and children and leave weeping and broken hearts throughout the**



length and breadth of Europe. . . Thank God there is one nation in Europe that has got leaders who are not sitting safely at home, but who are encountering as much danger as the rank and file of their followers . . . who have not translated the world into terms of machine-guns, poison gas or high explosives."

Father O'Flanagan's words proved prophetic. Only a few years after the war, the Conservative leaders who had led the war from their places of safety, were drinking with the Kaiser's successor, Hitler, with the result that the democratic strivings of the German people were stifled and another war took place. Even now (in 1954) the men who denounced Hitler's war-crimes so loudly, are handing back arms to their friends among Hitler's former generals.

So it will go on while the men who rule a nation do not share the hardships, experiences and dangers encountered by the people of that nation.

### TORY HYPOCRISY

**T**HEN, as now, Britain's Tory leaders covered up their crimes with hypocritical talk. The Irish movement which won national independence, like the Mau Mau of to-day, was a "plot." Father O'Flanagan replied to this propaganda in clear terms:—

**"They talk of their plots, but THEY are the plotters. They are criminals to come to Ireland at all. Their Lord Lieutenants and their Chief Secretaries are criminals against humanity by daring to come in, and try by force to run a country against the will of the people who are governed. And we can condemn them as criminals out of the mouths of these hypocritical leaders of England who profess they are fighting a war of self-determination."**

### DAIL EIREANN

**T**HE election at the end of 1918 was carried out under the new system of proportional representation, and eighty per cent. of the votes were cast for the Sinn Fein or Republican party. Father O'Flanagan addressed 100,000 people in an eve-of-poll meeting in O'Connell Street. The programme of this party was separation, and accordingly the Sinn Fein M.P.s refused to attend Westminster and called Dail Eireann which opened at the Mansion House of Dublin on January 21st, 1919. This was a revolutionary step and though the mass of the people supported it, it was not a "respectable" thing to do. Father O'Flanagan had by now been "silenced" by his Bishop, but he was invited to say the prayers with which this great historic First Dail was opened. Since De Valera, Arthur Griffith and thirty-four others were in jail, "Fe ghlas ag Gallaibh," Cathal Brugha presided, and the declaration of independence was carried by affirmation.

**"We have now done with England,"** said Cathal Brugha.

## BLACK AND TANS

**T**HE new Government, for such it was, asked the Labour Party to draw up a social programme, which was done, and then proceeded to carry out one of the most amazing achievements in history. It organised a "State within a State," appointed Ministers for each department of State, and set up a judicial apparatus known as the Republican Courts. Soon the British courts were deserted, as matters in dispute were brought up before the Republican Courts, of which Father O'Flanagan was a judge.

Much constructive work was done, in spite of the lukewarmness of the Griffith faction whenever anything likely to injure the rights of property was mooted, and Father O'Flanagan, who was now an Executive Member of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society and vice-president of the Gaelic League, participated to the full in the intense discussion of what use Ireland was going to make of the freedom which she was winning.

The British Government flooded the country with troops, for her armies were being brought from the Continent. It was of no avail. Early in 1920 the scum of the jails, ex-Army officers of the type now unfortunately in evidence in Kenya, young soldiers with no prospect in life, were hastily put into a mixture of police and khaki uniforms, and sent over to try to intimidate and terrorise the Irish into subjection, put down the Republican courts and destroy the Republican administration.

That this attempt was a failure is proved by the fact that after a year of rapine and destruction, Lloyd George was compelled to treat with the "rebels"—though not till he had already carried out the partition of Ireland without the consent of a single Irish political party. He brazenly lied to the Irish people by saying that partition was only a "temporary expedient."

## REPUBLICANISM

**F**ATHER O'FLANAGAN put some of his ideas into pamphlets. He was a republican, and a democrat.

"We are disciples of Tone," he wrote. "It is our business to teach the people of Ireland the principles of pure republicanism until all traces of the spirit of monarchism are eliminated from the country. In a monarchy the people are called subjects. The king is over all. The lower look up to the higher, and the higher sometimes graciously condescend to look down upon the lower. In a kingdom therefore, or even in a country in which the mind of the people is in a muddle between monarchism and republicanism, favour is all-important. Even at elections candidates go round from man to man and ask for votes as a personal favour . . . it produces that most pernicious form of individual, the 'man of influence.' The 'man of influence' is able to get votes for a friend and then he will be able to go to his friend and get jobs



for his supporters. Woe betide the people who are governed by such a system.

"A Republic is entirely governed by consideration of duty. Those who have the appointment to public office confer no favour on those they appoint. It is their duty to appoint only the most suitable person available. Where the true spirit of Republicanism prevails there is nothing to sap the independence or integrity of a single individual citizen. In a Republic the man who gives money for work is in no way superior to the man who gives work for money. In a Republic there is no room for influence."

#### CO-OPERATION

ON this subject Father O'Flanagan wrote a special pamphlet in which he said:—

**"In the Proprietary or Joint Stock Company the link that binds the enterprise and gives authority its rule is money, or capital. Hence we have the expression capitalist, and the expression 'capital' as distinguished from labour.**

**"Co-operation seeks a different and higher bond. Instead of the money link co-operation seeks to substitute a human link. Instead of building with the pound as unit, co-operation builds with the man as unit. The co-operative society has MEMBERS where the Joint Stock Company has SHAREHOLDERS . . . the object of the Joint Stock Company is to earn dividend. The object of a co-operative society is to make some common service as beneficial and as convenient as possible to the participating members."**

Father O'Flanagan held that the development of co-operative stores in Ireland has been artificially kept back by the influence of competing capitalist interests and said that—

**"the great advantage of co-operative shopkeeping is that it is a very simple way of teaching people the rudiments of co-operation."**

adding that to-day it was necessary for consumer co-ops to enter the field of industrial production, and to link together in a national organisation.

#### THE TREATY

ONE of the moves made by Father O'Flanagan during the Black and Tan period caused great political controversy. Lloyd George, after the usual fashion, complained that the Irish "Rebels" were the cause of the war in Ireland and that he profoundly regretted the "necessity" which compelled him to send Black and Tans to shoot, burn, and destroy.

Father O'Flanagan sent him a telegram saying: "You state you are willing to make peace without waiting till Christmas. Ireland is also willing to make peace. What first steps do you propose?"

Some saw in this a step in the direction of compromise. But some time afterwards Father O'Flanagan explained that "Lloyd George had been boasting and bragging about his desire for peace. I was the only one who could take the wind out of his sails without doing any harm. After this he said no more about peace."

Indeed, peace was not discussed until partition was carried out. Then, under the guise of looking for a settlement which would include the ending of partition, Lloyd George kept the Irish envoys engaged in protracted negotiations for six months, succeeded in splitting the Arthur Griffith faction from the consistent Republicans, and then forced on the divided nation the notorious "Treaty" or articles of agreement. This was, of course, not a genuine Treaty at all.

Father O'Flanagan consistently adhered to the Republican section, but was sent on a mission to America in November, 1921, just before the Treaty was signed. When he spoke at Cliffoney just before his departure, some of those who were in favour of capitulating to Britain were chased from the field.

#### RETURN

IT was several years before Father O'Flanagan saw Ireland again. He went from America to Australia where he met his old friend Archbishop Mannix. "For some compliments paid to St. George on the occasion of his feast" he was arrested and held for three weeks, after which he was placed on board a French ship and deported. From France he had to make his way back to America, but took with him the set of vestments and the chalice given him by the Archbishop.

He continued to work for the Republican cause in the United States until he was invited back by De Valera, who was already contemplating a new electoral policy.

Ireland was a transformed country when he returned. Much the same shock had awaited old Jim Larkin after his ten years' absence. The experiences of the national struggle had matured, but disillusioned the Irish people. The disappointment of the partition, split and bitter civil war (which British Tory statesmen openly boasted they were responsible for), had depressed them and a mood of frustration was abroad.

THOSE most capable of carrying on the tradition of 1916 such as the great incorruptible nationalist Cathal Brugha, the socialist Liam Mellows, and many others had either perished in the fighting or been done to death afterwards. British Imperialism had set Irish against Irish with its characteristic adroitness and cunning.

On the other hand, the check to National aspirations had also come about from social causes. "The rich always betray the poor,"



said Henry Joy MacCracken. But the fact that it was the rich who had allowed themselves once more to become the tools of British Imperialism and had split the national front meant that social questions came to the fore in a new way. Besides the changes for the worse in Ireland there had, on the other hand, been the great efforts of the British working class to secure justice in their country, and something which then seemed to many a breach of the laws of nature; the young Russian Republic which had overthrown the Tsar (or Emperor) in 1917, had consolidated itself and survived, and was evoking the more interest in Ireland from having been the only country to recognise the Irish Republic and do business with Dail Eireann. In order to confuse people's minds Britain had published a white paper alleging that Sinn Fein was inspired by the Bolsheviks. You do not have to be a Buddhist to trade with India—why must you be a Communist to trade with Russia?

### SOCIAL IDEAS

FATHER O'FLANAGAN held that it was now more important than ever for the Republicans not to content themselves with "pure" republican propaganda but to explain what the Republic would do for the people—how they intended to use freedom when they had got it.

In the course of a series of articles in "An Phoblacht," he wrote:—

**"What will the Irish Republic do for the labourers? What is the practical difference between the policy of Sinn Fein and the policy being pursued by the Free State Government?"**

**"What shall we eat and what shall we drink, and where-withal shall we be clothed?"**

**"These questions always have been asked and always will be asked. They arise from the necessities of our nature. In a supply of these necessities is the mainspring of human effort. If there be in a country people who are underfed, or who are insufficiently clothed, it should be a matter of grave concern to the Government and it may be, and usually is, to some extent at least, the fault of the Government themselves."**

Father O'Flanagan was head and shoulders above his contemporaries in linking republicanism with social changes. Like Connolly, he saw in material things "the mainspring of social effort." It was a priest's task to enlighten and encourage.

Speaking in Wexford, he castigated the hypocrites who tried to advance religious reasons to safeguard their social position.

**He said he had been called everything, from Luther to Anti-Christ. But the people of Wexford knew at least that the little horns he had were intended for use only against the enemies of Ireland.**

"People had been told that he intended to start a new religion. What he wanted was to see the people drink deeper and stronger draughts of the old. The fountain of their religion was the same for all. There was ample and full and most refreshing waters. But the channels that convey it to each individual soul are not always perfect. Intelligent Irish people will watch with interest a new experiment that is being made at present in the method of laying the pipes.

He hoped that in future they in Ireland would insist on getting their religious diet in better balanced proportions. They needed all four of the cardinal virtues. There was no need for him to say anything about prudence. It had many capable apostles. Prudence, with all its satellites, patience, meekness, obedience, was never allowed to disappear from the Irish sky. He would put in a plea for the other three—justice, fortitude and temperance.

To have a well-balanced table you require that all four legs be of equal length. In a well-balanced life you must have all four of the cardinal virtues equally developed. Prudence degenerates into a vice when deprived of the company of its three sisters. Prudence without justice is mere cunning. Prudence without fortitude is only cowardice. Prudence without temperance, hypocrisy.

The little Flower was an excellent saint to put before the French people on their victorious emergence from the greatest war in history. When France was in the same position as Ireland to-day, God sent her not a little Flower, but a Joan of Arc, who might be called a little "fury." They had in Ireland too much of the religion of the prodigal son. He put in a plea for the elder brother. The Irish people were constantly being told the first half of that wonderful gospel story; he ventured to think it a pity the second half was not told just as often.

**T**HAT there should be more joy in heaven over the one sinner doing penance is all right—for heaven. But as far as this poor earth was concerned he would much prefer to live with the ninety-nine. In Ireland they not only killed the fatted calf for the prodigal but they turned over to him the management of the entire farm, enabling him to reduce his elder brother to slavery, or put him on the road if he refused to accept the terms of a slave.

He did not want to restore the doctrine of the Old Testament "an eye for an eye." But if your enemy had taken one of your eyes and was on the way back for the other, what then? He would meet him halfway and if necessary take his



two, not as a reprisal, nor yet as a deterrent, but as a precaution.

Whatever of real religion there was in Ireland he wished to see preserved. He thought that Ireland as a whole was fairly well-practised in the religion of the knee-joints. What they wanted was more of the religion of the spinal column. When God was crowning his animal creation it was not by any oversight that he placed man among the vertebrates. He could have put an immortal soul into a Diptera or a Mollusc.

Let them not forget the old Irish proverb: "Hard upon hard make a bad stone wall, but soft upon soft makes none at all."

FATHER O'FLANAGAN acted as chairman of the sub-committee appointed to draw up a social programme for Sinn Fein. But the organisation was unable to resolve the important question of electoral tactics. The traditional policy adopted towards British government in Ireland had been abstention. This tactic had been carried over into the post-civil-war period and De Valera wanted to revise it. Unfortunately he also wished to set the party on a more compromising, less republican track, and though history would appear to have indicated that in proposing to enter the Dail (as the Free State Parliament was still called), he had the instincts of a sound tactician, the fact that Ireland is still partitioned shows that the content of his policy was insufficient to meet all the problems of the day.

Father O'Flanagan would not join Fianna Fail, preferring to remain with the republicans. The once all-powerful Sinn Fein party was only a remnant now. Yet nearly all existing parties in Ireland were originally breakaways from it.

### THE GLOOMY TWENTIES

IN the midst of the disillusion of the twenties, Father O'Flanagan laboured continually to keep alive the faith in Ireland and republicanism which he had held since his youth. Increasingly the weapon of slander and misrepresentation was being used against republicans and socialists. Speaking at the Easter Week Commemoration meeting at the St. Mary's Halls of Glasgow in 1926, Father O'Flanagan said:—

"Pearse represented the new generation in the fight of Easter Week, 1916, and it serves to illustrate how quickly the waves of resurgent national life succeed each other in Ireland when we remember that side by side with Pearse was the old Fenian who had served so many years of imprisonment in the jails of the Empire, Tom Clarke.

"When these two men took their stand side by side, it was mainly as representatives of Irish Nationalism that they stood,

but there stood with them another great Irishman who stood not merely for the right of Ireland to national independence, but who was in a more particular sense the representative of the workers of Ireland—James Connolly. He laid down his life for the Irish people to assert for them not only the right to be the political rulers of Ireland, but the economic owners of Ireland as well."

"I suppose," went on Father O'Flanagan, "that the greatest man in the history of Scotland and the tradition of the people is not Andrew Carnegie but William Wallace. Yet from the point of view of temporal success I suppose Andrew Carnegie was the most successful of Scotsmen, but the name of Carnegie will never thrill the blood of Scotland as does the name of Wallace. William Wallace from the point of view of the practical men of his time was just another foolish man like Robert Emmet or Pádraig Pearse. . . . It is not by such rules that the world of future generations will judge the actions of men."

#### RELIGION

**I**N this same speech Father O'Flanagan replied to the charge of having disobeyed his superiors.

"It is true," he said, "and some of you may not be aware of it, that I am at present under the censure of the Church. It is NOT the most serious possible kind of censure, because I am still a member of the Church, but I am what is known technically as a suspended priest. I have been disobedient and I have been suspended for disobedience. I have had deepest possible respect for the duty, under certain circumstances, of obedience, obedience within limits, but unlimited obedience I am not prepared to give to any authority in the world. The man who gives unlimited obedience is a slave. I am prepared to give a limited obedience—obedience within reasonable limits—to the authority over me.

"It is true that I am a priest. But I was an Irishman twenty-four years before I became a priest. Almighty God made me an Irishman and put upon me the duties of a citizen of Ireland and the duties that the law of God and the law of Nature have placed upon me, the law of no institution, even if it be a Divine Institution, can take away from me.

"I have refused to desert the cause at the bidding of my ecclesiastical superiors."

He went on to say that the Irish people have St. Patrick on one wall and Robert Emmet on the other, and to-day people feared a conflict between the two. Would they have to take one or the other down?

"It will never be necessary for the Irish people to do either if they would follow only one rule—to give to Emmet the things that are Emmet's and to St. Patrick the things which are Patrick's.



**To obey the Church in the things which rightly belong to the Church and to act as true citizens of the Irish nation when it comes to defending Ireland against aggression."**

He reminded his hearers that St. Columille came to Scotland because he was under the ban of the Church in Ireland.

### AGAINST FASCISM

**T**HE thirties saw a new upsurge of national struggle in Ireland, and, just as the struggles from 1913 to 1923 contained more social elements than had those of the 1880's, so the struggles of the Irish people during the early thirties were not only more concerned with unemployment, housing, and the "cardinal mercies," but had a higher awareness of international events. Less than ever could Ireland be isolated from the world.

It was in this period that Father O'Flanagan achieved his full stature as an international figure. Standing firm for the Irish Republic throughout its days of difficulty, supporting the struggles of the people against Imperialism, never afraid to get up on the hustings of O'Connell Street in company with men accused of "advanced views," Father O'Flanagan was one of those who from the beginning of the Spanish Civil War realised that General Franco was a usurper trying to destroy the Spanish Republic.

The suspension referred to in Glasgow had been removed but, fearless as ever, he did not hesitate to speak his mind again if his conscience demanded it. His speeches throughout Ireland, and particularly in the United States of America, and Britain too, are models of clarity and fervour. Some day they will be collected and treasured among the greatest Irish oratory of the twentieth century. For now but a few extracts must serve.

His American tour in 1937 was sponsored by the Friends of the Irish Republic and the Medical Section of the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy. The American-Irish still speak of the crowded halls and immense enthusiastic gatherings which he addressed wherever he went.

**T**HESE were the days when Frank Ryan was leading the Irish section of the "International Brigade," and the whole world stood in admiring wonderment at the heroism of ordinary people at Jarama and Madrid. It was also the first time that Fascism showed its true colours—German bombers on behalf of Franco reduced town after town to ruins while the republicans had not so much as an anti-aircraft gun. In Britain, Chamberlain's Conservative Government was "holding the ring" but secretly encouraging Franco since, as usual, the war was justified by the lie that the republicans were Communists, even if that had been any reason for bombing them if they were.

## AMERICAN SPEECHES

FATHER O'FLANAGAN was straight and uncompromising. When attempts were made to pretend that the Republicans were against religion and the opinions of one or two American-Irish clergymen were quoted, he replied:—

**"When the Church tries to step outside its own activity, which is to preach the gospel, it is very likely to go wrong."**

To a newspaper reporter, at this same Vancouver meeting, he replied:—

**"What will happen to the Church in Spain if the loyalists win? In ten years there will be more religion in Spain than there is to-day. It's true if Franco wins there'll be more pomp and ceremony. But it won't be religion. It will be that the old feudal aristocracy of the Church will be entrenched again in power."**

And, appealing for medical supplies, he said:

**"When the poor people are fighting against the rich they have need of everything. That's how it is in Spain. The poor are fighting the rich and they need everything you can send them from America."**

Speaking of the International Brigade, in which many of his fellow-republicans from Ireland were fighting, he paid a tribute to the "self-sacrifice and heroism of the lovers of liberty who have rallied from all over the world to help the Spanish people; the men of the Lincoln Battalion, he was at once surprised and heartened to hear, included Americans, Cubans, Irish-Americans, and Irish born. It was only natural that they, and the men of the Connolly Battalion from Ireland, should be comrades in the battle for democracy in Spain.

Of course, efforts were made to prove that Father O'Flanagan was still a suspended priest in the hopes of making people less inclined to listen to him. This lie was given currency in the Michigan Catholic, which accused him of "aiding the Spanish Reds," saying that he had come to America at the bidding of Sinn Fein in 1920 and had been suspended for it, and that he had spoken in Ireland with Father Ramon Laborda, a Spanish Republican priest.

Father O'Flanagan showed pictures of the magnificent reception he had been given by the ecclesiastical authorities in 1920, the whole of which year he was attached to the Church of the Sacred Heart in Roscommon Town. On his arrival in America in 1921 he had been met by Cardinal Mundelein in person.

On the other questions he pointed out that the Michigan Catholic had not reported the murder of Basque priests by Franco, and added that if he was not prepared to join his protests with those of other people he would be a follower of Nero, not of Christ. He boldly denounced the Michigan Catholic for demanding that



he show credentials before condemning tyranny.

In a later speech he said:—

"Why is it that a Catholic priest who twenty years ago had made himself beloved by the whole Irish race throughout the world for the part he played in the fight for Irish freedom should now that he has perhaps gone a little beyond the top of the hill, be prepared to make himself an object of horror to perhaps the majority of his countrymen out of love for another land? . . . I have learned to love Spain deeply since this war began. There is something higher and greater than Spain, and that is the cause of human liberty throughout the civilised world. There is another thing, not perhaps so important as Spain, certainly not as important as the cause of human liberty, but something that is nearer and dearer to me, and that is the good name and the welfare of my own Irish Catholic people.

"I pity the position into which they have been manœuvred, they who have been such lovers of liberty that they fought against the British for seven hundred years; and to consider why it is that they have been manœuvred into the position of being the outstanding enemies of liberty here in the United States to-day, why it is that they have been manœuvred so that they are the spearhead of Fascism in this great free land for which many of them and their ancestors shed their blood.

"They are against the cause of liberty in Spain because they do not understand the doctrines of their own and our own Catholic Church. And I say to the Catholic layman that you are not bound to accept your politics from your pastor. Rather you are bound if you are a real man and if you want to make yourself worthy of citizenship in a free country, you are bound to make up your own mind on political questions. And pay no more attention to your pastor's opinion than you would to the opinion of any man of equal intelligence and whose opinions are equally honest: and I say to the priests of the Irish race, you are not bound to take your politics from your Bishops. . . . If you do not speak your mind boldly on political questions then you have degraded your priesthood to the position of a mere job and your job is bigger than your soul. And I say to every Bishop in the Catholic world that if you accept your politics from the Pope you are unworthy of the citizenship . . . you are unworthy of the citizenship of any country in the world with the exception of the Vatican City. I say also to the Pope, you are not infallible in anything but purely religious doctrines . . . you are no more likely to be right upon what is going on in Spain than the bigoted Cardinal Primate, the Cardinal of Toledo. Because, Pius XI, what chance have you to hear the truth about Spain? Will you get it from those Cardinal friends of Mussolini? Is there any reason

why the Catholics should follow your political opinions to-day any more than 60 years ago at the time of the American Revolution?"

The speech from which that was a short extract was delivered in Madison Square Garden. In another speech in the New York Hippodrome, Father O'Flanagan said:—

"My suspension of 1925 was removed in 1927 by the Vicar General at the time when he was the supreme authority in the diocese to which I belong in Ireland.

"It is not for the purpose of defending myself that I have taken pains to prove that I am not a suspended priest. You know that when a Bishop suspends a priest he is not infallibly right. Many of those listening to me would really respect me more if they knew that I was really suspended. All of them would see standing beside me the spirit of Father La Valiniere, who bore suspension rather than desert the cause of the American Revolution at the bidding of the Bishop and Pope of his day. . . . I have been suspended on three different occasions, for attending meetings without getting leave from the local priest. It was clear to me that it was an abuse of Church authority to restrict the political freedom of a citizen and that it was my duty to ignore such an attempt."

FATHER O'FLANAGAN believed that if a political action was right and necessary, then the more who took part in it the better. He was not to be put off because Communists supported it as well. Everything should be judged on its merits. He said:—

"They are terrorising some newspapers because these organisations have gotten to believe that all the Catholics are quite willing to follow their dictates. Well, they are not. They are not quite so dumb as all that.

"It is of course a terrible crime for me to come here and address a meeting attended by Communists and, I suppose, attended very largely by Communists . . . and what a terrible thing it is to support a cause that is supported by the Bolshhevik Republic of Russia. . . . Because the Republic of Russia is supporting the Government in Spain, they say the Government in Spain must be on the wrong side. Well, the Republic of Russia is also supporting the people of China against Japan. I wonder are the Japanese also on the right side?"

"They tell us," Father O'Flanagan continued, "that the Russian people have turned their back upon God, but I wonder what kind of a God they turned their back upon? The God of the orthodox Church of Russia, of which the Tsar was the head? The God who was presented to the Russian people as a big policeman behind the tyranny of the Tsar, with a knout in one hand and some sort of miraculous amulet in the other? I don't know to what extent



the Russian people turned their back upon God. That is a very hard thing for anyone to tell because the experiment in civilisation and in government that is taking place in Russia to-day is something new in the history of the world.

"But when I was learning the catechism in Ireland I was taught that there were seven cardinal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked: to house the homeless: to comfort those that are in affliction: to visit the sick: and to bury the dead.

"And I think that the Government of Russia is making a better attempt to carry out those seven than any government I have read about in the history of the civilised world.

"They are feeding the hungry. As for giving drink to the thirsty, that doesn't amount to much any more. The trouble about the thirsty I know is that they get more drink than is good for them. They are clothing the naked. And they have no people in Russia with a new costly suit of clothes for every day in the year while others are in rags.

"And I believe that the great God who rules the heavens and who to me is a real being, will smile down upon people who are doing His will, even though they have been shocked into unbelief by the evil deeds that are done in His name. Rather than upon those who prate about His name in order to cover the iniquity of their actions."

This last paragraph summarised Father O'Flanagan's faith and his greatness.

#### LAST YEARS

IT is possible that Father O'Flanagan's tour helped to alter the history of America. For the first time somebody was brave enough to tell the truth to the Catholics of the U.S.A., however unpopular and unpalatable. It was unhappily not long before the Japanese launched their attack at Pearl Harbour and America was at war with those who had destroyed the Spanish Republic. If only he had been heeded earlier, the war itself might have been avoided. As it was he made it better understood.

He returned to Ireland, by way of London, and spent his last years in Dublin, where he had already been working on Irish history with a small staff of devoted workers. He lived at Sandyford, and used to say Mass at the convalescent home of the Sisters of Charity at Kiltiernan and the Carmelite Convents at Kilmacud and Roebuck.

Most of his holidays were spent in making local explorations for the histories he was writing in connection with the archaeological survey. He died at 4.30 a.m. on August 8th, 1942, just a few days before he would have been sixty-six years of age.

The funeral oration was given by Scelig, J. J. O'Kelly, who said:-

"The Almighty showered him with technical gifts and instincts which would have brought him fame as a scientist. He applied himself with zeal to safeguarding the treasured records of our history, a feature of this work being the preparation and printing of the voluminous and valuable letters of John O'Donovan and the placing of copies of them in the world's leading libraries.

"He adhered to his national ideals to the last and never dreamt of exploiting any of the great causes with which he was identified. All through the trials which were his lot he showed the unchanging fortitude and the high courage which emboldened him to confront and confound the Black and Tans when they sought to take his life in Roscommon in the course of the Terror. And so, when his end approached, no man ever welcomed any treasure on this earth more eagerly than he welcomed the summons to the judgement seat."

### HIS TEACHINGS

**A**BOVE all virtues Father O'Flanagan valued and practised moral courage, courage to stand for what was right and true, no matter how unpopular at the moment. To him the struggle of the Irish people for the united Irish Republic was a part of the world-wide struggle for peace and social emancipation that is the essence of this twentieth century we live in.

Where do you stand in this struggle?

This is the question every Irishman should ask himself.

Can anyone doubt where Father Michael O'Flanagan would have stood in the great controversies which rage at this moment? Would he stand for world peace or world war? Would he stand for Africa for the African peoples, the equality of all races and colours in the world, or for Imperialist subjugation of those nations who have not invented bombs and tanks? Would he ask the Catholic people of Ireland, whom he loved, and on whose behalf he spent his incomparable energy, to follow Brigadier-General Dorman O'Gowan's policy of a bloodthirsty compact with British Imperialism in return for a promise of the Six Counties, or would he preach the unity of the common people of both islands to secure by their own action rights which are theirs unconditionally?

He would join with all those who genuinely want a free united Ireland at peace with foreign countries and fight together with them confident that Ireland was big enough to hold all patriotic Irishmen whatever their political or religious opinions.

The story of his life and teachings, which ultimately came so close to those of James Connolly and Pádraig Pearse provides the answer. It should be pondered by every Irishman, and acted upon in time. For these ideas will live on when the petty scribblers of reaction are dead and forgotten.



# THE CONNOLLY ASSOCIATION

( was founded in 1936 when the London Branch of "Republican Congress" amalgamated with other organisations of Labour and Republican principles. Aim was to achieve James Connolly's purpose : Labour-Republican Unity.

**Alone neither can win a free Ireland — Together we will**

Here are its new aims and objects :

1. The ending of partition and the establishment of a free Democratic Republic in Ireland, following the principles of Pearse and Connolly.
2. The education of public opinion, especially that of the British Labour Movement, so that when a Government genuinely representing the British working people comes to power it will withdraw troops from Ireland and remove the obstacles to unity.
3. To encourage Irishmen to become active Trade Unionists supporting the British workers in all their struggles for better conditions.
4. To fight racial discrimination against Irish and other peoples in Britain.
5. To support the cause of world peace.
6. To answer slanders against the Irish people, in particular to show how Irishmen can make their country rich and prosperous if Imperialist obstacles to using its vast resources can be removed.

**JOIN NOW!**

*(Form on inside cover)*

DO YOU WANT TO  
**DO** SOMETHING  
*For Ireland and her People?*  
Then you must organise

The Connolly Association is the organisation for Irish men and women working in Britain because it—

1. Stands unchangeably for the ending of Partition and the establishment of an independent Irish Republic where Pearse's principle will rule.

"Make no mistake who will be master in Ireland . . . the people will be Lord and Master."  
—*Padraig Pearse.*

2. Supports the Labour movement in Britain, believing that provided the Labour movement is clear in policy and united in action it will be a force strong enough to compel British Imperialism to get out of Ireland.

"The Cause of Labour is the cause of Ireland ; they cannot be dissevered."—*James Connolly.*

**Read the IRISH DEMOCRAT**  
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