

The Irishness of Francis McCullagh

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The photograph of the Irish journalist Francis McCullagh attached to the safe-conduct pass issued to him by the Francoist forces on 13 December 1936, during the Spanish Civil War, shows a man who would not have stood out in any crowd. Small in stature, and dressed conservatively in a coat and scarf, he could have been a school-teacher or a bank clerk rather than the well-known war correspondent he had become. This ability to blend into the background had evidently served him well in a career which, over a third of a century, had seen him reporting on a whole series of major global and regional conflicts. As a contemporary - and sometime rival - Gertrude Gaffney of the *Irish Independent*, described him:

One can visualise his crinkling, whimsical smile, his twinkly blue eyes, his shabby clothes, following war campaigns in his characteristic big boots with two pairs of heavy, Kerry-knitted socks inside them; consorting with the men of forests and mines; sitting at back street cafes and mountain inns in any part of the world, getting inside the skin and behind the mind of the populace; then changing into his best suit and patent leather shoes to call at an embassy or dine with a government minister.¹

¹ Gaffney, G. (1935), 'Francis McCullagh', *The Capuchin Annual*: p. 26.

I have written elsewhere about the principal elements in the trajectory of his extraordinary career.² The purpose of this essay, however, is to explore in more detail some of the tensions and ambiguities affecting the journalistic agenda of a man who was born a British subject, but whose role as an international journalist was increasingly shaped by his personal and national background in the years following the Treaty that ended the Irish war of Independence in 1922. It also provides an example of the way in which journalism during this period offered the opportunity of social mobility to people of relatively modest backgrounds at a time when, particularly in Ireland, access to other professions for this class was curtailed not only by socio-economic but by religious factors.

There were, in fact, two distinct pathways of this kind for journalists or would-be journalists from the Catholic middle and lower middle classes in Ireland. One well-explored one was the revolutionary path, often subsidised by money raised by John Devoy and others in the United States, and followed by people such as Griffith, Pearse, Connolly and Larkin. The other, less studied, encompasses a substantial group of Irishmen who ended up as emigrant journalists and occasional novelists, like Stephen McKenna, who worked for Pulitzer at the Paris office of *the New York World* in the 1920s, and Emile Joseph Dillon, a Dubliner who moved seamlessly from the world of the international foreign correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* in Moscow at the beginning of the twentieth century to a position as special adviser to a senior Russian politician. All of these, and McCullagh himself, were substantial figures in the journalism of their era, although the fact that they generally worked abroad and for non-Irish newspapers means that they were not well known in the country of their

²Horgan, J. (2009), 'Francis McCullagh, the Great Foreign Correspondent,' *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 144 (November), pp. 542-64.

birth. What is interesting about McCullagh's journalism, however, is that it seems, despite his relatively tenuous links with the country of his birth, to have been substantially more influenced by his Irish political and religious beliefs, especially in his later years, than that of many of his contemporaries who also worked for the international press.

He was born on 30 April 1974 in Omagh, Co. Tyrone, to James and Bridget McCullagh. His father was a publican, more than likely a supporter of the Irish Party at Westminster, and his son followed a traditional path through secondary education, but aimed immediately at a career in journalism, trying first Dublin and then Scotland. He seems, however, to have been in two minds, for at a comparatively early age he returned to Ireland to pursue a vocation for the priesthood at St. Columb's College, Derry.

The college records are incomplete for this period, so that the details of his studies there are unclear, but an anonymous account which appeared on his death, evidently by a contemporary, gives a substantial amount of detail about him, describing him as 'one of the ablest and most popular students.'³ It added: 'He was quiet, even to shyness, amiable, always anxious to help and of a really unusual serenity of disposition. Though he often had occasion, no one ever saw his frown, and never was he known to lose his temper. His proficiency in shorthand was a blessing to those students who were blessed, or otherwise, with faulty memories.'⁴

³Onlooker, 'Francis McCullagh', 'Derry Journal', reprinted in 'Ulster Herald', 29 December 1956.

⁴ Ibid.

His religious sentiments remained strong throughout his life, and there is evidence that he wondered at times – particularly when his journalistic career appeared to be in the doldrums – if he had made the right decision. Writing in 1901 to the editor of an American religious magazine to which he contributed articles about Japan, he expressed his regret at not having continued his studies, and confessed that he still had “an inclination to enter the clerical state: and would like to know if it is a call from God or not.”⁵ Subsequent events were rapidly to push this ‘inclination’ into the background.

One characteristic which McCullagh shared with his many of his foreign correspondent colleagues of the era was a sort of insouciance which at times developed into raw courage, or perhaps an attitude to risk born of a belief that Europeans led a charmed life in those far-flung corners of the globe into which they ventured.

Some of it may simply have been a taste for adventure, almost a Boys-Own-Paper appetite for derring-do. His second journalistic job abroad, after a brief and unsatisfying sojourn in Ceylon, was in the late 1890s in Siam, then a cockpit of competing international influences, primarily those of Britain and France. Here, according to a writer who interviewed him some years later about his exploits, he ‘gravitated by a process of natural law to the centre of the danger zone’.⁶ His nationality probably helped him secure a job as assistant to an Irishman named Lillie, who was editor of the *Siam Free Press*, and also local correspondent of the New York

⁵ Hudson Papers, University of Notre Dame Archives x-4-c, Francis McCullagh to Fr. Daniel Hudson, editor, ‘Ave Maria’, 18 January 1900.

⁶ Unsigned article (1912), ‘Francis McCullagh’ Review of Reviews for Australasia, No. 2, February, p. 563.

Herald. Within a month, unexpected events propelled his career upwards. Lillie was expelled from Siam for publishing articles which exacerbated the tensions between the King of Siam and France, and McCullagh immediately succeeded to all Lillie's multifarious roles, but managed to avoid incurring a similar fate. While his new-found connection with the *New York Herald* was to be a prime factor in his later journalistic career, at this stage he was still a traveller in the foothills of journalism, and developing an appetite for taking risks.

My lack of journalistic experience brought me into trouble sometimes. If I found anyone committing a crime I generally spoke my mind about it, whether the case was sub judice or not. As a result I was a frequent visitor to the British Consular Court: once because of something I wrote of a Eurasian accused of abducting an Irish girl named Donoghue; on another occasion because I made an onslaught on a Siamese Prince accused of maltreating a little girl. On both these occasions I came before Mr Archer, then British Consul; in Bangkok....On every occasion, I don't know how, I got off scot free. I don't know how Mr Archer managed it. He probably took into consideration my extreme youth and my good intentions. As a result of these controversies, however, the Siamese Attorney-general threatened to horsewhip me, whereupon, as he was a big man, I considered it necessary to buy my first revolver. The Attorney-General never carried out his threat.⁷

After moving to Japan and working on the *Japan Times* for some four years – for the first six months of which he lived *à la Japonaise*, sleeping on the floor and subsisting

⁷ Ibid., p. 564.

largely on rice - he moved in 1903 to Port Arthur, in Russian territory, because his journalistic nose had detected the probability of the then imminent Russo-Japanese war. He then, like any modern free-lance, successfully exploited his earlier connections with a cabled offer of his services, to James Gordon Bennett, publisher of the Paris-based *New York Herald*, for which he had contributed occasional articles from Siam some six years previously. This combination of good luck and initiative immediately made him one of a small number of internationally-known war correspondents writing for British and American papers: it also generated the first of his many books,⁸ which helped to consolidate his reputation.

An interesting indication of his bargaining power during this period – enhanced in all probability by the fact that, in a non-globalised world, is that McCullagh sold his material simultaneously into many different markets in Britain, the United States, India, China and Japan. In London, the crusading editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, W. T. Stead, the London editor of the *Review of Reviews*, rapidly became one of his most enthusiastic patrons.

Notable exceptions from his range of outlets were, of course, the Irish newspapers. Although he had written for *T.P.'s Weekly*, published by T.P. O'Connor in London, he never featured, until much later, in the columns of Dublin newspapers. These were either serviced by other agencies (the *Irish Times* traditionally relied substantially on the London *Times* as well as on the emerging international news agencies), were without the resources which enabled their larger metropolitan contemporaries to employ full-time correspondents or remunerate well-known free-lances, or were

⁸ McCullagh, F. (1906), *With The Cossacks*, London: Evelyn Nash.

simply more parochial. This apparent lack of interest, on McCullagh's part, in contributing to Irish publications may have had a financial element to it; but it also mirrors the fact that his nationalism was, at this stage, evidently marginal, and he had no hesitation in invoking his technically British nationality as an asset in a number of foreign situations. He once described himself as 'the only Britisher' among a particular group of foreign correspondents, while admitting that he was a Britisher who was marked by an Irish 'contrariness'.⁹ At the same time, he did not hesitate to draw on his Irish background whenever he felt it was relevant, or to illustrate a comparison that he thought was worthwhile. He was, for instance, to strike a – somewhat oblique – anti-colonialist note in a book he wrote later on the 1908 revolt in Turkey and the triumph of the Macedonians against Abd-UI-Hamid, Many of the scenes of savagery which he had witnessed reminded him, he wrote in a later book on these experiences, of 'what I had read of Ireland after '98 or Scotland after the '45'.¹⁰

Two episodes from this phase of his career, as a correspondent covering the Balkan wars, help to illustrate the ease with which he managed to combine his Irish ethnic and cultural consciousness with a British political identity. The first provides evidence of his willingness – indeed, keenness – to negotiate trenchantly as a British subject when it had positive implications for his career. This was in November 1908, when, living in Pera, near Constantinople, he was offered the Order of St. Sava by King Peter of Serbia. This development, no doubt part of a primitive media management campaign engaged in by various Balkan powers and which targeted particularly British journalists, gave rise to a lengthy correspondence as McCullagh, legally a British subject, had to apply to the Foreign Office for permission to accept and wear

⁹ McCullagh, *Cossacks*, p. 287.

¹⁰ McCullagh, F. (1910), *The Fall of Abd-ul-Hamid*, London, Methuen: 136.

it.¹¹In 1912, his British citizenship was also of considerable advantage to him as he continued to report on the conflict. At one point, travelling with the Turkish Army, he was captured by the Bulgarians. Such was his fame that the quashing of a rumour that he had been killed after having been captured went rapidly around the world as a news story in its own right, as did the subsequent report that he was still alive.¹² He was released after the intervention of the British Ambassador in Sofia.

The second episode, which also provides evidence of the ways in which a correspondent of his stature was also a welcome contributor to academic for intellectual publications (he had already written learnedly about Japanese story-telling traditions in the *East of Asia* periodical in 1902) was his preface to a book of Turkish stories edited by a friend of his, the well-known British folklorist, Allan Ramsay,¹³ to whom he had earlier dedicated his own book on Abd-UI-Hamid and events in Turkey.

McCullagh's preface, lengthy even by the relaxed standards of the times, is a paean of praise for Turkish culture and humour, and for the Turkish coffee-house which, apart from its regrettable exclusion of women, which he regarded as at least the equivalent of the Irish pub for conviviality. This conviviality, however, was - in McCullagh's opinion - confined to Irish pubs in Catholic ownership. He recorded in his preface, with ill-concealed scorn, a notice that he saw in a pub owned by an Orangeman and Covenanter near Belfast in which he observed following notice: 'Customers are requested to consume their liquor as quickly as possible and then to leave. Some people seem to think that their purchase of a small quantity of liquor at

¹¹ National Archives, Kew, FO 372/127, McCullagh to Whitehead, 5 April 1909.

¹² *Van Wert Daily Bulletin*, 23 November 1912.

¹³ Ramsay, A. (1915), *Tales from Turkey* (foreword by Francis McCullagh), London and New York: Methuen.

the bar entitles them to remain on the premises as long as they like. This is a mistake.’¹⁴

He spoke more freely about his Irishness in interviews about his career than in his published work, as in a picaresque anecdote about an unsuccessful attempt he made to win the confidence of a local chieftain in the course of a visit to Morocco in 1912 on behalf of Stead’s *Westminster Gazette*.

I was promptly expelled from Agadir by Kaid Gilhooley, a Moorish chief, who is evidently of Hibernian descent, for, although a Mohammedan and as black as a coal, he keeps St. Patrick’s Day, possesses a most pugnacious disposition, and wears an green turban which looks like a an old National League flag. I am also afraid that Gilhooley drinks, for I presented him with a bottle of alleged Irish whisky (sic) which I had bought at Casablanca in the shop of an Italian Jew. On discovering on this bottle the alarming legend ‘Made in Poland’, I decided to present it to the Kaid, since, being a Mohammedan, he would not taste it. Gilhooley accepted it with alacrity, and said that he wanted to keep it as a curio. But I am afraid that he must have sampled it, and that this accounted for the sudden change in his attitude towards me, for in a wild burst of fury he expelled me. I am glad that I got off with my life, because that whisky must have been awful stuff.¹⁵

It was around this time, however, that another aspect of his Irishness – specifically, his Catholicism – began to play a larger part in his journalistic consciousness, and

¹⁴ Ramsay, *Tales*, p. xiii.

¹⁵ ‘Review of Reviews’, p. 566.

output, than hitherto. This was amply evidenced in a number of visits he made to Portugal between 1910 and 1914 to report on the overthrow of the monarchy there – reports in which he castigated the anti-Catholicism of the new regime, not only in British papers but also in - a new outlet for him – in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Review*¹⁶ and *The Twentieth Century and After*.¹⁷ The former may well have been the first occasion, in which he appeared in print in his own country. One of his reports¹⁸ poked fun at the near-chaos in the ranks of the new government and decried the regime’s actions in closing down soup-kitchens run by Catholic nuns for that country’s poor. On the other hand, his journalistic impartiality was also evident in his scathing description of the exiled royalists as “exiled ‘bosses [who] are doing more swindling in exile than they ever did at home.’¹⁹

McCullagh’s idealism and his talents were now exercised in another dramatic theatre of contemporary events – the Italian invasion of Tripoli. Accredited as a correspondent with the Italian forces in the autumn of 1911, his initial enthusiasm for what he evidently saw as a civilising mission was rapidly replaced by a growing hostility to Italian methods and, in particular, their reprisals against the civilian population. His personal commitment to Catholicism was, for the first time, sharply modified in these reports by what he saw as - and described as - the mercenary attitude of the Vatican and the activities of its representatives with the Italian forces. Eventually, he became part of the story himself, as he and a number of other

16 McCullagh, F. (1911), ‘The Separation of Church and State in Portugal’, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* Vol. XXIX, June, pp. 595-603.

17 McCullagh, F. (1914), ‘Portugal: The Nightmare Republic’, *The Twentieth Century and After* (January), pp. 148-70

18 McCullagh, F. (1911), ‘Portuguese Republicans Fiddling While Rome Burns’, *New York Times*, 21 May.

19 McCullagh, ‘Nightmare’, p.163.

internationally renowned correspondents returned their accreditation papers to the Italian General Caneva in protest against Italian atrocities, and returned to London.²⁰

W.T. Stead, who was particularly receptive to McCullagh's writing, praised his reports from North Africa, and described McCullagh, in somewhat extravagant terms, as someone cut from the same cloth as another heroic journalist of an earlier era. He wrote:

In 1876 an Irishman in the service of the British and American press paralysed the policy of Lord Beaconsfield, destroyed the traditional alliance between created Bulgaria. His name was MacGahan. In 1911 we have again the apparition of an Irishman in the service of the British and American Press who has exercised, and is exercising, a potent influence on the policy of Great Britain....Francis McCullagh....whose ready pen, whose fearless spirit, and whose presence in the firing line has made it possible to make the great public realise the criminality of the plunder-raid on Tripoli.²¹

This episode prefigured, perhaps, the dilemma of the 'embedded' correspondent in the Iraq wars of the twenty-first century. McCullagh's final verdict, in the book he wrote about this campaign, was damning. 'Italy has got a nice handful. Like Dead Sea fruit, Tripoli has turned to dust and ashes in her grasp. She wanted to annex territory. She has annexed sand, poverty, rags, misery, cholera and corruption. Was it necessary for her to go abroad? Has she not got enough of these commodities at home?'²²

²⁰ Cf Los Angeles Times, 13 November 1911, 'Returns Pass to Italians'.

²¹ 'Review of Reviews', p. 563. The fact that Januarius MacGahan (1844-78), although the son of Irish parents, was born in the United States, did not detract from Stead's enthusiasm.

²² McCullagh, F. (1913), *Italy's War for a Desert*, Chicago: F.G. Browne, p. 89.

The bravery described by Stead was soon to be in evidence in quite another context, as he went to Russia to report the opening phases of the first world war. When he was asked why he spent so much time with the Russian troops in the front line, he explained disarmingly that it was because he was short-sighted.²³ But then, frustrated by war-time censorship of his despatches, he joined the British Army. Although he served throughout that war, mostly in the cauldron of hostilities around Gallipoli, he never wrote about his experiences during this period. At the war's end, he was assigned to the British Expeditionary Force under General Knox in Siberia, where his knowledge of Russian and of journalism proved useful. His correspondence from Siberia to an academic acquaintance, Sir Bernard Pares (himself a former journalist),²⁴ is notable for McCullagh's keen interest in the development of both his professional and his military careers, which were evidently running in tandem.

He told Pares that the correspondent of *The Times* in Siberia, whom he identified only as 'W,' was regarded as being so much in the pocket of the White Russians that Knox had cabled Wickham Steed in London to have him removed.²⁵ When Col. Knox asked the War Office if McCullagh could be allowed to earn some money by writing for some of the London papers, he got permission to allow him to do so as long as the articles were unsigned.²⁶ McCullagh also wrote to the *Spectator* asking for books for review. McCullagh was also increasingly annoyed at the lack of preferment. Despite his high-grade work in intelligence and propaganda, promotion from lieutenant to captain had been made only in an 'acting' capacity, and he now risked being reduced

²³ Derry Journal (1936), 'Irishmen famous in Russia', Lecture by Sir Bernard Pares, 9 November.

²⁴ School of Slavonic and Eastern Studies, London (SSES), Siberian log of Sir Bernard Pares, PAR 6/9/1.

²⁵ SSES, McCullagh to Pares, 1 September 1919.

²⁶ Ibid. McCullagh to Pares, 1 November 1919.

to the rank of lieutenant again. ‘This’, he told Pares, ‘would injure me in the eyes of the Russians[...] I have had five years in the army now and to be merely acting captain is not good enough. I want to make the War Office realise that a writer has his pride.’²⁷

Eventually his contingent was captured by Bolshevik forces, but he managed to deceive his captors into believing that he was a journalist rather than an army officer, and spent several months thereafter wandering through Russia until he aroused official suspicions that led to him being imprisoned in the Lubyanka in Moscow before being repatriated to Britain. His reports on the situation inside the new revolutionary state, which included one of the first articles detailing the circumstances of the execution of the Romanovs at Ekaterinburg, were published widely thereafter and eventually appearing in book form,²⁸ added substantially to his fame. He was increasingly lionised, especially in the United States, where he went on a widely publicised lecture tour, and found receptive ears for his denunciations of the new Russian regime. His political criticisms of Lenin, the ‘arch-conspirator’ were, interestingly, counter-pointed by a savage attack on the ‘gang of international concession hunters’ who now besieged the Kremlin.²⁹

In another article he wrote amusedly about the answer given by an Irish-American communist to a Soviet official who had asked him to write the history of the agrarian movement in Ireland, presumably to offer Russian farmers a template to copy. The

²⁷ Ibid. McCullagh to Pares, undated, but between 9 September 1919 and 1 November 1919. McCullagh was finally confirmed in his rank as captain on 26 November 1920 (National Archives, Kew, WO 339/21565).

²⁸ McCullagh, F. (1922), *A Prisoner of the Reds – the Story of a British Officer captured in Siberia*, London: John Murray.

²⁹ McCullagh, F. (1920), ‘Scenes in the Kremlin’, *Los Angeles Times*, 7 November..

Irish-American, with a better grasp of Irish history than the Russian official, warned him that he did not know what he was asking for: if Russian peasants learned how Irish peasants had united to throw off the yoke of the oppressor, he implied, they might take the wrong lesson from such an example.³⁰

Whereas his initial critique of the new state had focused primarily on what he saw as civil rights issues, as misguided economic policies, and on an authoritarian democratic centralism, he returned to Russia in 1922 to make the regime's atheism the principal target of his critique. His return coincided with a number of show trials of prominent clerics, to which he seems to have been the only correspondent to have had access, aided by his facility for disguise and his ability to speak Russian. His more considered, but no less passionate verdict on these proceedings was delivered in a book published very shortly afterwards,³¹ which recounted the trials in some detail. His book is notable for several things, not least its pen pictures, not only of the accused, but of their accusers. He took pains to give details of the charges as well as the defence, and his description of the atmosphere in which the trial was held is redolent of the heightened emotions on both sides. The fashionable anti-semitism so commonly associated with anti-Bolshevism at that time, however, makes a particularly objectionable appearance, as in a passage in which he claims to identify, on the basis of physiognomy alone, 'many Hebrew faces'.

While the procurator was demanding six lives, a Jewess walked slowly down the hall from one of the front seats. She was a particularly repulsive-looking elderly woman in a low-necked white dress, and, as she swept past, she

³⁰ McCullagh, F. (1920), 'New face of Russia', Oakland Tribune, 4 December.

³¹ McCullagh, F. (1924), *The Bolshevik Persecution of Christianity*, London: John Murray.

nodded and winked at friends on each side of her, who nodded pleasantly in return. About the same time two Polish women, overcome by the ferocious bellowing of Krylenko [the prosecutor], left the court in tears....A good many of the women present were Reds; one could see that not only by their attitude towards the prisoners, but also by their short hair and their rich dresses.....at the terrible end of the trial, when one could almost hear the Angel of Death beating his wings in that hushed and crowded court, they scrutinised the faces of the condemned men through their opera glasses as hungrily and insistently as they would have scrutinised the faces of great actors on the stage.³²

Increasingly aware that the Russian authorities were on his trail, he slipped across the border into Poland, from where he returned to the United States. The *New York Times*, reporting his arrival from Europe on the liner 'Saxonia' on 5 November 1924, quoted his view that the Russian jails were full of socialists, and his prediction that, although the Soviet system would remain in power for another decade, that country would eventually return to a monarchical system of government.³³

More significantly, and specifically in relation to Irish affairs, he publicly endorsed the authenticity – as he saw it – of the infamous “Zinoviev letter,” a document concocted by the British secret service which helped to bring down the first British Labour Government in 1924 because of its supposed instructions from Moscow to British Communists to increase agitation in the United Kingdom, especially in the armed forces. In McCullagh’s view, one surprising effect of the publication of this letter had been to detach Irish voters in Britain from their former allegiance to Labour

³² Ibid., pp. 146-7.

³³ *New York Times*, 6 November 1924.

and, rather than waste their votes by supporting the Liberal party, to give them to the Tories, the party that had been the traditional enemy of Irish nationalism. ‘The Irish in England’, he observed, ‘are a devout people, who know something of what the Bolsheviks have done to religion. So that when the definite connection between Moscow and some of the Labour leaders was revealed they left that party.’³⁴

McCullagh was now a figure of considerable international stature, and was lionised as such on his arrival in the United States. As he moved into a more relaxed mode, journalistically speaking, he struck up a relationship with the Jesuit magazine *Studies*, in Dublin. Between 1924 and 1930 he was to contribute articles to this journal on a wide variety of topics, and a narrowing of his journalistic focus dates substantially from this period. It is not at all improbable that this was reflected, and was related to, the successful outcome of the War of Independence in Ireland, and he did not hesitate to draw parallels – and warnings – wherever he found them. He analysed the new Russian state for readers of *Studies*, in a way that uncannily predicted the problem of nationalities that was to play a significant part in the demise of the Soviet Union, and also drew interesting parallels between Russian Jews and Irish nationalists:

Never, after this, can any great power afford the luxury of persecuting a minority as the Irish Catholic was persecuted in Russia during the nineteenth century; for such minorities tend to ally themselves with the revolutionary forces that are now lurking in every State, and to bring with them a violence of hatred and a careless of consequences which your cold, theoretical revolutionist somewhat lacks. Earl Balfour used to deplore the addiction of the

³⁴ *Olean Evening Herald*, 14 November 1924.

mere Irish to murder, but I think that England was luck in having the Irish to oppress, and not the Odessa Jews, whose priests never condemned oath-bound secret societies. No rabbi ever thought worse of a co-religionist who, in imitation of Samson, brought down death on himself as well as on his enemies; and had Irish priests taken a similar view in '98 and at various other periods of crisis in Anglo-Irish relations, many English battleships and arsenals might have gone sky-high.³⁵

This brief passage provides many clues to his own views about Ireland as well as about Russia. He condemned the despotism of the Tsars, as containing the seeds of its own overthrow. He implied that the Irish revolution was more successful – because less bloody – than that of the Communists, whom he equated, by and large, with the Jews. And his Irish Party-style nationalism undoubtedly led him to give the credit for the success of moderate Irish republicanism to the Irish Catholic clergy, whose politics he compares favourably with the extremism of the rabbis.

It is hardly surprising that, during this period, his journalism also begins to display an increasing concentration on the fortunes of the Catholic Church. What began as an enthusiasm began to assume the characteristics of an obsession – an obsession which, although it had been to an extent held in check during his work in Russia, fatally oversimplified and exaggerated his coverage of the two civil wars – one in Mexico, the other in Spain – which were to provide a coda for his journalistic career.

Mexico was not, initially, his idea. It was possibly his connection with *Studies* that led him to contact Fr. Wilfrid Parsons SJ, the American editor of the Jesuit journal

³⁵ McCullagh, F. (1930), 'Leon Trotsky', *Studies*, Vol. XIX (March), p. 427. See also Horgan, John (2009), 'Journalism, Catholicism and Anti-Communism in an Era of Revolution: Francis McCullagh, War Correspondent, 1874-1956', *Studies*, Vol. 98, (390), pp. 169-184.

America, with an offer to write articles about Britain. Parsons made a counter-offer to persuade him to go to Mexico and to report for *America* from there on the largely Catholic ‘Cristero’ uprising against the left-wing and anti-clerical Calles government. McCullagh replied, with the insouciance of the free-lance correspondent, that “he would come immediately if he got enough money.”³⁶ Parsons then approached the Knights of Columbus, who came up with a substantial commitment of funds. After travelling incognito through Mexico, evidently not without considerable danger to himself, and McCullagh succeeded in getting a substantial number of articles hostile to Calles published in the United States, notably in the *Wall Street Journal* but also in a number of other US regional newspapers. His pro-Catholicism, however, was now becoming more strident, and that the balance evident in his articles from North Africa and even from Portugal appeared to be on the wane. The principal fruits of his labours was a book-length account of his investigation which evoked a torrent of criticism.³⁷ To describe “Red Mexico” as one-sided would be a serious understatement. *The Nation* described it as ‘sizzling interventionist propaganda, vintage of over a decade ago, acidified in the interval’.³⁸ James J. Horn described it four decades later as ‘unscholarly’, which was perhaps an inverted compliment, and, more accurately, as ‘a masterpiece of intemperance’.³⁹ Even the *Manchester Guardian*, which had praised his work on Russia, noted that the book, ‘by its very vehemence, defeats its own ends.’⁴⁰ There were similarly hostile critiques in the newspaper which had published

³⁶ Wilfrid Parsons, *Mártires mexicanos. Relatos sobre la persecución religiosa en México*, <http://www.universidadabierta.edu.mx/Biblio/P/Parsons%20Wilfrid-Martires.htm> (accessed 10 April 2007).

³⁷ McCullagh, F. (1928), *Red Mexico: A Reign of Terror in America*, (New York, Montreal and London: Carrier.

³⁸ Gruening, E. (1929), ‘Red Rubbish’, *The Nation*, Vol. 128, No. 3316, 23 January, pp. 110-11.

³⁹ Horn, J.J. (1975), *US Diplomacy and ‘The Specter of Bolshevism’ in Mexico (1924-1927)*, *The Americas*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (July), p. 35.

⁴⁰ P.J.M. (1928), ‘Mexico, Green and Red’, *Manchester Guardian*, 4 December.

so much of McCullagh's work in the past, the *New York Times*,⁴¹ and, at around the same time, in the *New York Evening Post*.⁴²

There is evidence that not only his articles, but also his book, became embroiled in the US Presidential election of 1928, in which Alfred Smith, a Catholic, was the Democratic Party's candidate. His book was not published until after the election and when, in December 1928, it finally reached the bookstores, his American publishers revealed that publication had had to be postponed five times because Catholics associated with Smith's campaign feared that it would raise the religious issue during the presidential election.

Back in Ireland in 1928 for what seems to have been one of his rare visits to his homeland, his increasingly strident advocacy for Catholic causes received a warmer welcome and he gave a crowded meeting in the Royal Dublin Society the benefit of his on the Calles regime in 1928. He came to Ireland again in 1933 for a holiday, when he was interviewed at length by the intrepid Gertrude Gaffney, an *Irish Independent* journalist whose editor, Frank Geary, had afforded her the kind of roving brief (including the right to contribute articles on foreign and domestic politics) rarely accorded in that era even to her male counterparts. It was undoubtedly this meeting which led to the flattering profile of McCullagh which Gaffney contributed to the 1935 issue of *The Capuchin Annual*, and in which he confided that his main journalistic interests for the future involved a return to Russia and Japan, the scene of his earliest journalistic triumphs.

⁴¹ *New York Times*, 20 January 1929.

⁴² Anita Brenner, "Mexico Painted in a Lurid Red by McCullagh", *New York Evening Post*, 2 February 1929.

His plan to return to Asia, however, was aborted by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. He rapidly assembled a modest portfolio of editors (including, for the first time, that of the *Irish Independent*), and set off imbued with enthusiasm for Franco and his cause. His subsequent book⁴³ detailing his experiences, while not insensitive to the defects of the anti-Republican forces, or to the woeful inadequacies and mismanagement of O'Duffy's Irish Brigade, was passionately and unashamedly pro-Franco. The potential appeal of these articles for Irish readers was, however, undermined by two unexpected developments. One was the hostile attitude of the Spanish censors, who found his pro-Franco sentiments insufficient justification for his modest critique of the problems of O'Duffy's force; the other was the decision of Frank Geary, the editor of the *Irish Independent*, to send his star journalist Gertrude Gaffney out to Spain, from where she contributed a lengthy series of articles while McCullagh's languished in the Spanish censor's office. Among the few pieces he wrote that did get through was an impassioned plea to de Valera to take steps towards recognising the insurrectionist regime – a plea which, despite the intervention on his behalf of Dr. Mageean, the Bishop of Down and Connor, fell on diplomatically deaf ears in Government Buildings.⁴⁴

At the end of the Spanish Civil War, no doubt conscious of the looming hostilities that were to engulf Europe in Europe, he left Paris for New York, and spent the remainder of his life there without engaging again in the world of journalism. This son of Tyrone, however, once happy to describe himself as a 'Britisher', was now obsessed by a desire to campaign against Britain's continuing role in his native Northern Ireland, and wrote to Irish diplomats in New York 1940 to offer his services

⁴³ McCullagh, F. (1937), *In Franco's Spain*, London: Burns Oates and Washburne.

⁴⁴ McCullagh, F. (1936), 'A Plea to de Valera', *Irish Independent*, 16 October.

should they decide – as he urged them– to wage a propaganda war against Britain on this issue in the United States. His offer was ignored; indeed, the fact that it was even made in such terms provides graphic evidence of his growing estrangement from the geo-political realities of the world he had reported for most of the previous four decades.

For all that his later concerns and predilections now seem old-fashioned and unbalanced, those of his earlier career were not entirely out of temper with the times in which he lived, when democracy, and religious freedom, were not as well-grounded political realities as they are today. His last work – lost with his papers after his death – was a long novel about the events of 1798 which he appears to have been working on episodically for most of his life. He died in a New York mental hospital, afflicted by dementia, on 25 November 1956, but would undoubtedly have appreciated the fact that his passing was recorded, not only in a number of Irish newspapers, but in the two great metropolitan dailies in London and New York.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Derry Journal, 28 November 1956; New York Times, 26 November 1956; Irish Independent, 28 November 1956; Derry Journal, 28 November 1956; Tyrone Constitution, 1 December 1956; Ulster Herald, 1 December 1936; Londonderry Sentinel, 29 December 1956.