

The last house in High Street is now Tom Murphy's, brother of Mrs. Kearney of the Metropole but it was in 1885, Michael O'Neill's Indian Tea warehouse, a very select grocery, and direct importer of brandies and wines. Michael O'Neill was son of Mrs. O'Neill of the Imperial Hotel who was a daughter of Walter Hanlon who founded the hotel. Stephen Kehoe seems to have been the occupier in 1850 and Michael Sullivan the lessor.

Across here stretched the High Town or English Gate taken down about 200 years ago.

This article concludes the survey of High Street begun in No. 6 (1953) and carried through No. 7 (1954), No. 12 (1960) and No. 13 (1961).

James Stephens and the Fenian Rising

PROFESSOR D. R. GWYNN

I was invited at first to talk to you about James Stephens but I had to decline the invitation because I found it almost impossible to obtain enough information about Stephens to form any serious appreciation of him. So much bitter comment about him was written by some of his principal colleagues among the Fenians, and there is deplorably little evidence available to form any impartial judgment. So I suggested instead that I should talk about The Young Ireland Rising of 1848, in which Stephens as a young man took an active part, and to trace the connection between the two risings of 1848 and 1867, leading up to the Fenian inspired rising of 1916.

The problem that has often puzzled me is that, whereas the failure of 1848 rising was inevitable for many obvious reasons, the Fenian rising had been diligently prepared for years and had acknowledged leaders. They knew what they meant to do and had many special advantages for a successful insurrection. The Fenian rising was planned for 1865, when it would have had great chances of success with the backing of Irish American officers and soldiers who had recent experience in the American civil war. But the rising was deferred until

1867 when all prospects of swift success had vanished. How and why did that misjudgment take place?

BALLINGARRY

Let me deal briefly at first with the rising of 1848. Some twenty years ago the centenary of that pathetic failure was celebrated at Ballingarry. The ostensible leader of the rising was William Smith O'Brien, who was my great grandfather. I was for that reason invited to deliver the centenary address at Ballingarry, and I subsequently wrote a book about the whole story entitled *Young Ireland and 1848*. I remember that when I came to Ballingarry at that time, I was asked very naturally: "Why did the rising take place in the district which they chose?" The answer is simple, and it depended on various special factors at the time. There had been no concerted plan for a rising in the early summer of 1848, and there were not even any definite leaders for such a plan. The famine had lasted three years, with a loss of more than a million victims from starvation or from famine fever; and the British Government had taken no adequate steps either to save the people from starvation or to retain Irish grown food in the country. Some of the more ardent spirits among the Young Ireland group especially John Mitchel, had been openly preaching that the people must resort to an armed insurrection. But his increasingly defiant appeals for insurrection, at a time when there were no arms available and no organised volunteer movement, had simply alerted the British Government to the danger of trouble. Mitchel himself was arrested and deported, and the Government was preparing to arrest all the other Young Ireland leaders.

SMITH O'BRIEN AND FAMINE

They had little hope of achieving anything by an insurrection until, in the spring of 1848, there was a sudden popular revolt in Paris which dethroned Louis Philippe and established a republic without bloodshed or any serious resistance. The Young Irelanders took heart and sent a deputation to Paris, headed by Smith O'Brien, to congratulate the new Republic. Smith O'Brien's prominence in the movement requires some explanation. He was a Protestant landowner from County Clare, and his brother subsequently became Lord Inchiquin. He had

been elected as member for Ennis at first as a young Whig who aspired to be a social reformer. He had been as member of Parliament for almost twenty years at the time of the rising, and the young men had regarded him with special respect: partly because he was their only member of Parliament, and he was also considerably older than they. He did not join the Repeal movement until after O'Connell's arrest and imprisonment, when the intended monster meeting at Clontarf was forbidden by Sir Robert Peel in 1842. He had such personal prestige that when O'Connell was then sent to prison, he immediately appointed Smith O'Brien (although he was so recent a convert) to be deputy leader during his own imprisonment. His integrity and his gifts for public life made him a hero to the younger men; and during the famine years Smith O'Brien at Westminster had borne almost the whole burden of fighting for government relief.

His personal efforts to relieve famine resulted in his being made the recipient of gifts and subscriptions from many countries to aid the famine victims. At times, when his young friends begged him to come to Dublin to advise them, he had to reply that he could not leave County Limerick, because literally hundreds of people depended on his personal exertions locally to keep them alive.

O'Brien had been deeply angered by the failure of the British Government to take measures to control the famine. The successful insurrection in Paris in 1848 revived his hopes of compelling the Government to give legislative powers to Ireland. On his return from the delegation to Paris he threw himself into the organisation of volunteer clubs all over the country, and he went from place to place arousing enthusiasm and inspecting parades. When Mitchel's increasingly reckless defiance alerted the Government, and he was arrested and deported, the young men who led the Irish Confederation saw that a clash with the government might soon occur. They elected a council of war to prepare for insurrection, but Smith O'Brien was not even a member of the war council. He felt committed to continuing his inspection of volunteer clubs in every county. The council of war never met as such; but its members were John Blake Dillon, Thomas Francis Meagher, Richard O'Gorman, Father Kenyon and Thomas Devin Reilly. They all be-

lieved that they need not fear any move which might precipitate a rising for at least a month. During that time they thought the Dublin Clubs would have been adequately organised.

KILKENNY

But word came suddenly that Smith O'Brien and all the prominent leaders were to be arrested. O'Brien was at that time staying with his friend Mr. Meagher at Wexford, inspecting clubs, and they all decided to join him there and make some plan. Thomas Francis Meagher's narrative explains that Wexford was not yet sufficiently organised and that some bold success must be attempted. "We saw at a glance" he writes "that in Waterford, in Kilkenny, in Tipperary we might calculate upon the warmest and boldest spirit". They considered making a start in New Ross and Waterford; but in each case they would be exposed to naval bombardment from the river. So they decided to make for Kilkenny. It was on the frontiers of "the three best fighting counties in Ireland, Waterford, Wexford and Tipperary, and thousands of volunteers could converge there. Two special considerations also recommended Kilkenny. The Irish railway system was still far from complete; and although the line to Limerick was already available, the railway south from Dublin still went no further than Bagenalstown, so that Government troops could not be readily moved there by rail. Moreover the Royal Agricultural Society was just holding its annual cattle show, so that there could be an abundant supply of beef and mutton for the volunteers, and many important local hostages might be taken.

The details of what followed cannot be described here. Lack of enthusiasm in some places, and the open discouragement by the clergy in others, had a disheartening effect. It was found impossible to attempt any assault on Kilkenny city for lack of armed and trained volunteers. They proceeded then to Carrick, where wild enthusiasm had been shown at recent demonstrations. But the younger clergy who had given active sympathy then, now discouraged any open support for the insurgents. The greatest disappointment of all was Father Kenyon in his own parish in Tipperary. He had been elected time after time to leading positions in the Confederation, and he was even elected to the War Council. But he refused, when the time

came, even to allow a flag to be hoisted in his parish or to have the people summoned by church bells as was done in many other places. The leaders were soon joined on the hills round Ballingarry by almost a complete muster of Young Ireland. But by that time it had become evident that the people were in no condition after three years of famine to revolt in a spontaneous insurrection.

NO PUGNACITY

One fatal lack, apart from the absence of any military plan, or even any ultimate aim, was that the leaders were by nature quite unsuited for revolution. Smith O'Brien particularly made it his first duty to prevent bloodshed. When it was suggested that trees should be cut down to block the roads O'Brien insisted that no property should be taken without the owners permission. He assumed full personal responsibility as leader of what he saw to be a forlorn hope; and he showed great courage in his personal actions. Instead of attempting the capture of a police barrack, he went boldly in and told the police what he had come for, and appealed to them as Irishmen to join the rising or at least to make no opposition. The police were astounded and left the barrack immediately without resistance. And in the final clash, at the Widow MacCormack's house in Ballingarry, when the house was barricaded by armed police, with a surging crowd outside, O'Brien walked up to the window unarmed to demand their surrender. Even Blake Dillon and Meagher showed a similar lack of pugnacity. At Callan they found the Market Place occupied by a party of the 8th Hussars, cleaning their equipment. Meagher went into parley with them, and appealed to all Irishmen among them to join the rising. He assured them they would not be molested, and turning to the crowd outside he called for "Three cheers for the 8th Royal Hussars".

A few days later, the same Irish Hussars advanced to Killenaule, where Dillon, Stephens and McManus were erecting barricades in the main street to stop two troops of cavalry. When the cavalry arrived Dillon mounted the barricade, with stones in each hand, while Stephens got and presented his rifle at the officer in command. Dillon then parleyed with the officer and got his assurance that they were only going to escort the assize judge at Nenagh, and had no intention of arresting

O'Brien. Dillon then let them pass, one by one, through the barricade, while the crowd cheered them.

At the Commons of Ballingarry there was a muster of almost all the leaders of the movement. They included O'Brien, Dillon, Meagher, Davin Reilly, besides Terence McManus, Michael Doheny, Leyne, Cantwell, Stephens, and John O'Mahony. Stephens first appears prominently at this stage, and Smith O'Brien had more or less appointed him as his personal assistant. Subsequently, writers have often claimed that if only Stephens had been permitted by Dillon to shoot the very officer whom he allowed through the barricade at Killenaule the whole country would have risen in revolt. Stephens had a second opportunity for defiant action in the final debacle at Ballingarry. The police Inspector Trant feared a massacre of himself and his forty armed men when he found what a large crowd had assembled on the Commons. He took refuge in the Widow MacCormack's house and used her and her children as hostages for their own safety. O'Brien refused to allow any attack on the house while she and her children were inside.

Stephens and Terence McManus who had come urgently from Liverpool to take part in the rising were with O'Brien and managed to escape with him when the police were reinforced, and the crowds dispersed. McManus had actually tried to set fire to the house from behind, by lighting bundles of damp hay which he had carried at great risk, under fire from the police. Stephens with a rifle had been itching to fire but was restrained. Here again it is often held that his defiance might have changed history. But no one can believe that, who reads the clear narratives of those who were on the scene, with their descriptions of a multitude of half starved men and women and their children, who had assembled on the Commons in hopes of finding food at some military camp.

Meagher himself declares, in describing the scenes of wild enthusiasm at Carrick when he went there a few weeks before the rising that the whole population would have risen if they had been given the order then. Yet when the rising was actually attempted the priests prevented any response from the people. John Blake Dillon, who had taken an active part at every stage of the insurrection, wrote afterwards that "if Hannibal or Napoleon had been in the position of Smith

O'Brien, neither of these commanders, with such material as he had, and such co-operation as he received, would have achieved a more respectable result". Dillon describes the arms available to them as "about thirty rusty fowling pieces with an average of one round of ammunition for each; while barely half a dozen club men followed him to the field". His orders and instructions were received by the people with respect sometimes with cheers but they were never obeyed. And Michael Doheny, who afterwards became one of the founders of Fenianism declares that the truth is Mr. O'Brien was "among a people who were sorely stricken by terror".

FENIANS FOUNDED

Doheny was to record later his experiences, in company with James Stephens in escaping arrest until they boarded a ship in Cork harbour which brought him to America and Stephens to France. There he and Richard O'Gorman and Dillon, who had also escaped, soon established themselves in legal business, and it was in Doheny's office in New York he and Stephens met after some years, and decided in 1858 to found the Fenian Movement. Doheny had been the oldest of the younger men in the rising of 1848, and he already had some practice as a barrister. Smith O'Brien, alone among them, held any public position, and even Meagher who had contested an election in his native city of Waterford had failed there. The others were all young men, still unknown outside their own districts. I hope that someone in Kilkenny will this year trace how many of the leaders of that time came from Kilkenny. One of the most notable among the older group in Young Ireland days was Dr. Kane. Among the subsequent pioneers of Fenianism was Joseph Denieffe, who returned to Ireland from New York to organise a more aggressive movement. The most famous of the Kilkenny Fenians was James Stephens. After escaping to France and managed to earn a living by teaching English in Paris. John Devoy in his recollections, states that while in France James Stephens learned of Denieffe's attempts to organise a national revival in Ireland. Stephens returned to Ireland at once and there joined in a meeting of Denieffe's friends, who had almost lost hope, since they had no further news from Doheny and his associates in New York. Doheny says that Stephens was "penniless at the time, but was the most hope-

ful man among them, and he insisted that they should hold together until they could send Denieffe back to America to procure financial aid". So Denieffe returned to New York and there learned that no further meeting had been held among Doheny's friends. But they met at once and sent Denieffe back to Ireland.

Stephens in the meantime made his living as a tutor of French in Ireland. And on St. Patrick's Day, 1858, in the words of John Devoy "Stephens blocked out the form and charter of the organisation which was called the Irish Republican Brotherhood, wrote down the oath which every member afterwards took, and started on a tour of the country, so far as the limited resources at his command would justify, accompanied by Denieffe. He was later joined by Thomas Clarke Luby, who had returned from Australia. Before long they formed in Skibbereen, a little organisation called the Phoenix Society, in which O'Donovan Rossa was the leading spirit.

FENIAN OATH

From these beginnings, stimulated by such incidents as the National Petition Movement around 1859. Fenianism gradually became a widespread organisation. Its leaders were even more unknown to the general public than the leaders of Young Ireland had been; but they had learned much from the failure of Young Ireland and they now had a clear objective in view. The Young Irelanders as very young men had at first chiefly to give a new impetus to O'Connell's agitation for repeal and an Irish Parliament. Their programme and their wider ideas found expression in the weekly *Nation* newspaper; and they were more concerned with education and industrial and economic progress than with deciding what sort of national government they desired. But the Fenians now made an Irish Republic the supreme object of their agitation, and they declared themselves at once to be a secret society. John O'Leary states that the first form of oath was slightly remodelled by Luby, at the request of Stephens to overcome the objections to the first version, which had been denounced widely by the clergy. The revised oath was as follows :

I, A.B., in the presence of Almighty God do solemnly swear allegiance to the Irish Republic now virtually established; and that I will do my very utmost, at every risk while

life lasts, to defend its independence and integrity; and finally that I will yield implicit obedience in all things, not contrary to the law of God, to the commands of my superior officers. So help me God. Amen”.

Other variants of the oath appear to have been adopted at later stages but they are substantially the same. In the original oath drafted by Stephens there was an additional phrase” and that I shall preserve inviolable secrecy regarding all the transactions of the secret society that may be confided to me”. At any rate it is clear that every Fenian on taking the oath committed himself to working for an Irish Republic.

That at least gave a certain coherence to the whole movement and Stephens provided for an acknowledged leadership and an executive to frame its policy. Devoy claims that Stephens had blocked out the form and character of the organisation “after his return to Ireland from Paris in 1858. But it was now much more widely based than Young Ireland had been. It drew its support largely from the emigrants who had gone to America and had acquired money there, and from the exiles returned from Australia and from England. All were by that time affected deeply by a positive hatred of English rule in Ireland, and by the harrowing memories of the famine and in many cases by their own bitter experience as convicts. When the political prisoners gradually reached America, after escaping from Australia, they found that many of the principal Young Ireland leaders were already established there. Meagher was there and Dillon and O’Gorman and Doheny and Terence McManus, while Darcy McGee had gone to Canada. McManus had arrived just in time for the rising of 1848 from Liverpool where he was already making a successful career as a merchant. He and James Stephens had remained with Smith O’Brien to the end, when the rising failed at Ballinacorney. He had escaped as a convict from Australia, to America and settled in California. There he died in 1861, and his death gave the first big impetus to the young Fenian movement. His Irish friends decided that he must be brought back to Ireland for burial and he was given an immensely impressive funeral when he reached Dublin. Devoy claims that it was much larger even than the funeral of O’Connell. It was a test he

writes "not of the strength of Fenianism but of the revival of the fighting national spirit, which had been thought dead after the great famine and the failure of the Young Ireland movement".

STEPHENS ORGANISER

Devoy states that the McManus funeral gave a strong impetus to the Fenian movement and made recruiting easy. Devoy was out of Ireland himself at the time, having joined the French Foreign Legion to get military training and experience. When he returned to Ireland in 1861 he was amazed at the extraordinary change which had taken place in the spirit of the country. Fenianism made rapid progress thereafter. It is easy to understand how and why Stephens obtained such a strong personal mastery of the movement. He was more educated than most of the younger men, and he already had an occupation as a young civil engineer in public employment at the time of the rising of 1848. But his name was unknown throughout the country when he returned from his exacting years in Paris and joined forces with the Phoenix society in Skibbereen and a few other small groups. Even Terence McManus had been virtually unknown to the vast crowds who assembled for his funeral; it was only known that he had been a leader in the 1848 rising and other leaders of that rising were now taking part in helping the revival of a new nationalist uprising.

Stephens could do little more than act as a link between the small secretly formed societies in Ireland, and the exiles in America and Australia who were ready to give help. Yet Stephens somehow imposed his own personal control over the movement. He had come in contact with some of the secret revolutionary movements in France, and he adopted their system of organisation, which was quite unlike the methods of open organisation and election which had prevailed in Ireland. Stephens arranged that the new movement should be organised in circles of ten members, each circle having a centre or master. When ten members were enrolled another circle had to be formed with another centre. Nobody was to know who the other members were, and the local centres were responsible to a district centre, and these in turn to divisional or county centres. The county centres elected the provincial representative on the

supreme council which consisted of only seven elected members. One each represented Leinster, Munster, Connacht and Ulster, and the other three represented North of England, south of England and Scotland. Four more members were co-opted by these.

Mr. P. S. O'Hegarty, who has been the chief propagandist for the Fenians and was himself a member of the supreme council of the I.R.B. writes that "it was so arranged that only top members knew anything material about the ramifications of the organisation or its personnel. Stephens himself, O'Hegarty continues, "as founder and Head Centre assumed and exercised an autocratic power over the organisation, a power of decision as to policy and action on his own, without any consultation with anybody else, such as none of his successors either claimed or exercised".

That description of his position as head centre of the Fenian organisation can scarcely be doubted. To our own age it is surprisingly suggestive of the part played by Mussolini and by Hitler as leaders of the movements which they organised. But both Hitler and Mussolini had supreme gifts as popular orators and as journalists, whereas Stephens appears to have had neither. He was a born conspirator, and he had the same gift making dramatic appearances in all parts of the country.

FENIAN NEWSPAPER

Stephens also inspired loyalty and admiration among his associates, but many of them soon resented his arrogance and refusal to consult with them. There was reason for similar resentment against the high handedness of Parnell some twenty years later, but Parnell at least produced results, and he was an inspiring orator. Stephens soon felt the need for a newspaper as an organ of the movement; and in the autumn of 1863 he announced without any previous consultation that he would establish the Irish People as a weekly. It was to be edited by John O'Leary, with O'Donovan Rossa as its manager. Neither of them had been told what was expected of them, but they produced the first issue at the end of November that year. He had intended that there should be three joint editors, O'Leary, Charles Kickham and Thomas Luby under his own direction. Actually Stephens did write the leading articles of the three first numbers, but he wrote nothing afterwards, and his lead-

ing articles were turgid and sensational and not at all comparable with the writing of his editors. His own third and last leader was a virulent attack on writers and speakers who now famous term of "felon setters". The paper continued for two years until its suppression by the Government; and the main theme of its propaganda was to denounce all moderate or evolutionary movements which did not accept the doctrine of physical force, and to insist that the people must be prepared for action.

APEX OF FENIANISM

Mr. P. S. O'Hegarty in his "History of Ireland under the Union" has made himself with close inside knowledge the principal exponent of the Fenian doctrine. He claims by the end of 1865, when the Irish people were suppressed, the number of enrolled Fenians "cannot have been far short of 100,000." Its strength he says lay in the shop assistants, clerks and working men in the towns, and the agricultural labourers and small farmers in the country. The comfortable classes, the large farmers and the upper classes were outside. But the mass of the people was with it, and the bulk of the young men who were not members were sympathetic to it, as were many of the older men. It brought into full play for the first time the Irish exiles, for the Irish in Britain and the Irish in America were enrolled in quite as high a relative strength as the Irish at home. It represented really and truly the Irish Race, and at this period no Irish movement not tolerated or supported by it had any chance of maintaining itself. In seven years Stephens had accomplished in the matter of organisation what he had set out to do, he had organised Ireland for another insurrection. At the end of 1865 the most formidable insurrectionary organised material since 1798 was in existence in Ireland, wanting to fight, meaning to fight, drilling and preparing such war material as it could.

There was more to it, than this enrolment of very large numbers. The fact that preparations were being made for a definite objective, and under a leader of ability and energy who had achieved a national reputation, made it completely different from the hurried insurrection of 1848. That had been obviously a gesture of despairing protest, after the Government had issued orders to imprison all the leading figures. Moreover

there was help now forthcoming from Fenians in Britain and in America who had vowed to have vengeance for the famine which has exterminated thousands at home and driven many more into exile. There was even the sure prospect of help of a military nature from Irishmen who had seen active service in the American civil war, who would bring and send arms for an Irish insurrection was then imminent has been well described by the late Desmond Ryan, whose authoritative life of James Stephens is expected to appear this year. Desmond Ryan had acquired unrivalled knowledge of the Fenian period, and he edited the large volumes of Devoy's "Postbag", and published various books about the period. Ryan describes 1865 as "the one golden moment of Fenian strength, when success lay within its grasp; the British garrison in Ireland was subverted by Fenian calls within its ranks; its barracks and armouries lay at the mercy of one bold stroke. The prestige of Stephens after his daring escape from Richmond, was at its height. The organisation was intact all over the country, many thousands strong; its military leadership of Irish American veterans from the American civil war still available; its backing in Great Britain and the United States was still formidable although threatened by internal tensions, personalities and the policies of insurrection at home or alternative of a Fenian invasion of Canada. Stephens in the end, with the reluctant assent of the civil war veterans, hesitated and, in the opinion of John Devoy, threw away the last chance of success. Two years later came the abortive token insurrection of 1867, the fall and deposition of Stephens (then in New York) for opposing it, and the shadow of his name thereafter which lingers to this day".

FENIAN ENROLMENTS

P. S. O'Hegarty, who had a dominating temperament himself, shows sympathy for the attitude of James Stephens in being the Head Centre and the Boss who admitted nobody to a seat beside him. But Stephens had from the beginning relied largely upon the Irish in America for money for the organisation, and also for the supply of arms; besides hoping for the assistance of thousands of Irishmen trained in military service during the American civil war. The enrolled Fenians in America kept pressing for a date for the rising, and Stephens let it be known that the date was to be the end of 1865. The

civil war in America ended in April, 1865, and many Irish American Fenians came back to Ireland to assist the work. O'Hegarty claims that by the summer of 1865 there were in Ireland at least 300 such officers, many of them of high rank, all of them with full technical experience either in battle or in staff work". Specially important was the spread of Fenianism in the British regiments in Ireland. Some of the most famous Fenians, including John Devoy and John Boyle O'Reilly, had taken great risks in enlisting in these British regiments and organising Fenian cells among them. It has been seriously claimed that 60 per cent of the 26,000 regular troops then in Ireland were Irishmen, and that 8,000 of them were sworn Fenians. There were 7,000 more among the regiments in England; and it was assumed that, with the help or even connivance of these Fenians in British units, the armouries could have been captured quickly and the insurrection spread through all the military centres.

Apart from these special preparations, it was widely believed that the number of enrolled Fenians in Ireland was at least 100,000. But how much did these huge enrolments mean in practice? The country had grown accustomed to such popular enrolments since O'Connell's time, in the Catholic Association, and later the Repeal Association, Father Matthews temperance movement was supposed to have still wider membership. But in practice the Fenian organisation was absolutely controlled by Stephens himself, and he remained a mystery man to the end. The Americans disliked such assertions of personal authority by a man about whom they knew so little. Still more they resented his arrogance in dictating to them.

AMERICAN SPLIT

John Devoy in his "Recollections of an Irish Rebel" recalls that at a New York convention in 1865, when the rising was widely expected to take place before the end of that year, John O'Mahony read out a letter from James Stephens which was published a few days later. In it Stephens referred to his critics in America and said "Lash them from you like so many dogs". Devoy states that the split among the Irish Americans had been brewing for several months, and that there had been many public manifestation of it. But this outrageous letter from James Stephens "evoked such anger among O'Mah-

ony's opponents that the breach became irreparable. Yet Stephens depended entirely on America for funds to arm the men in Ireland. He neglected the work of collecting at home, and the funds already collected were now to be expended on an invasion of Canada.

Of Stephens himself John Devoy writes that "as Chief Organiser of the Irish Republic, and head of the movement in Ireland, Stephens was a very clever man but not in any sense a great one. He was not the founder of the movement, but he organised it and made it what it was. He had fine organising ability and much influence over young men, but he lacked some qualities of leadership, and when confronted by unforeseen difficulties because of the split in America, he was unable to cope with them and failed". Devoy certainly showed real devotion to Stephens while the rising was being prepared; and he took a principal part in carrying out the escape of Stephens, by climbing a high wall at Richmond Jail.

JAIL AND ESCAPE

Even P. S. O'Hegarty records one fatal mistake by Stephens which contributed greatly to preventing the rising. Stephens had taken a liking to a man called Nagle who worked in the printing office of the Irish People, and had agreed to serve as a spy for Dublin Castle. In September, 1865, Nagle introduced a visitor at the Irish People office who had a letter for Stephens from Clonmel. What happened then, says O'Hegarty is almost incredible. Stephens gave his unknown visitor two letters to be taken back to Clonmel. One was an order for fifty pikes, the other was a letter to be read at the Fenian centres in Clonmel. It contained these words "There is no time to be lost. This year must be the year of action. I speak with a knowledge and authority to which no other man could pretend and I repeat the flag of Ireland, of the Irish Republic, must this year be raised". The spy Nagle later got possession of this letter and soon handed it to the police. This was the first definite intimation that had reached Dublin Castle, and the Irish People was immediately suppressed, and all who were connected with it, particularly Luby and Kickham and Rossa were arrested. Stephens was arrested on November 11th and tried three days later. He was lodged in Richmond prison where some of the staff were ready to assist his escape. On the

4th he was rescued by a party led by John Devoy. His escape over the prison wall is described by Devoy himself in his recollections. The effect immediately stimulated the enrollment of Fenian members; and the Government had not yet become aware of the infiltration of Fenian cells in the British regiments. In February some of the soldiers in Richmond barracks threatened to start the rising themselves and there was similar pressure from other sources.

PLANS FOILED

On February 1st Stephens refused to move until MacCafrey, whom he had sent to America, could produce results. The American Fenians also opposed any further delay, but Stephens would not agree. Devoy particularly urged immediate action. He had a definite plan to take Richmond barracks, where the troops were largely Fenian and from there to move against the other barracks and capture the Pigeon House fort, which had some 30,000 rifles. Kelly, the first Colonel, who replaced Stephens, and Halpin who was chief of the American officers in Ireland, agreed to delay, only to enable the transport of some 2,000 rifles which were awaiting dispatch from Liverpool. But once again plans were foiled. The British Government's decision to suspend the Habeas Corpus Act had not been foreseen. Stephens and Kelly escaped to America, but they failed to reconcile the split and Stephens remained there. All the principal Irish leaders otherwise were now under arrest. But Kelly returned to Ireland, and plans were fixed for an insurrection in February, 1867. The date was changed to March and the rising was at last attempted under pitiful conditions. Tempests of rain and snow which lasted for days made progress by such forces as were available almost impossible.

As P. S. O'Hegarty writes "The rising was a gesture rather than an insurrection. Men in hundreds, and in places in thousands marched but mostly with pikes, but sometimes with nothing, sometimes with officers and sometimes without. There was fighting on a very small scale in the counties of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Tipperary, and Clare. Kerry had its turn in February. Col. Godfrey Massey, who was to have headed the southern insurrection, was arrested at Limerick Junction on the night of the 5th as he stepped out of the train, having been given away by (the spy) Corydon. By the evening of the sixth

of March it was over. England in Ireland was once more secure”.

We are today left wondering why the failure was so complete, when the conditions for a rising had by all accounts been so favourable? Were the accounts greatly exaggerated, of the total number of Fenians, and of the extent to which the Fenians among the British regiments had been prepared to take part? My own impression is that all these stories of monster meetings and of mass enrollment have been generally taken to mean much more than they actually meant. On the eve of the 1848 rising, when preparations had scarcely begun and when there was no determined leader like Stephens with a definite plan, the demonstrations of enthusiasm for young Ireland in counties Cork and Waterford had been most impressive. But without arms they were as powerless as were the mass of hopeful demonstrators whom O'Connell had assembled at Clontarf.

DEMONSTRATIVE FUNERAL

But the Fenian movement had unquestionably revived and strengthened the force of a militantly anti-English nationalism. It is easy for us to forget the appalling sacrifices and sufferings which the Fenian prisoners endured for their part in the rising which had so little chance of success. Of the survivors Stephens became a discredited and almost forgotten figure until his death in America. But he was brought home for another of those demonstrative funerals which have marked every phase of the nationalist movement. Old John O'Leary spent the later years of his life in Dublin and exercised a remarkable influence on the next generation, who regarded O'Leary with special reverence. They included the poet Yeats and Douglas Hyde the founder of the Gaelic League.

When Stephens died, O'Leary was asked to deliver his funeral oration: and its brevity must have surprised many others besides myself. There had been long public orations for Terence McManus and for Parnell, and later Pearse's funeral oration on the return of O'Donovan Rossa became the first dramatic signal for the rising of 1916. These orations were all prepared with great care; and it may be assumed that John O'Leary took equal care in preparing his own funeral oration for

James Stephens, who had been one of his closest colleagues, and who had appointed him as writer of the Fenian weekly *Irish People*. Yet I quote now all that O'Leary actually said in presence of an immense crowd of old Fenians.

"I do not care to dwell here and now," said John O'Leary, "upon what Fenianism was, or what it did for Ireland, but I think it will be generally allowed that it was in its time a great power in the land, and James Stephens was a great—indeed the greatest—power in Fenianism. I do not believe that his memory needs any further or higher eulogium than that."

We may even suspect signs of disillusion, or even of personal dislike, in the briefness of that funeral oration. But O'Leary was praising so much one man as the brave spirit of patriotic sacrifice that had been inspired by Stephens more than any other.

In the last years when James Stephens himself was a neglected exile in America, and his former colleagues had mostly died, O'Leary himself became the symbol of what Fenianism had stood for. Among those whom he had inspired in his life was a young Irish poet, William Butler Yeats. Many of you may be familiar with the verses which Yeats published in 1913, in praise of John O'Leary and in protest against the desire for comfort and security that had come after him :

But could we turn the years again,
 And call these exiles as they were,
 In all their loneliness and pain.
 You'd cry some woman's golden hair
 Had maddened every mother's son—
 They weighed so lightly what they gave.
 But let them go, they're dead and gone,
 They're with O'Leary in the grave.

That was an early tribute, by the greatest Irish poet of our time to the spirit of the old Fenian leader who had given him such inspiration in his youth. And when all is said for or against the Fenians and their unsuccessful rising, we may remember that when Yeats was stirred most deeply even in a private matter by what he felt to be a denial of the old spirit of generosity and self-sacrifice, he thought of the old Fenians, and the one man among their leaders whom he really knew, JOHN O'LEARY.