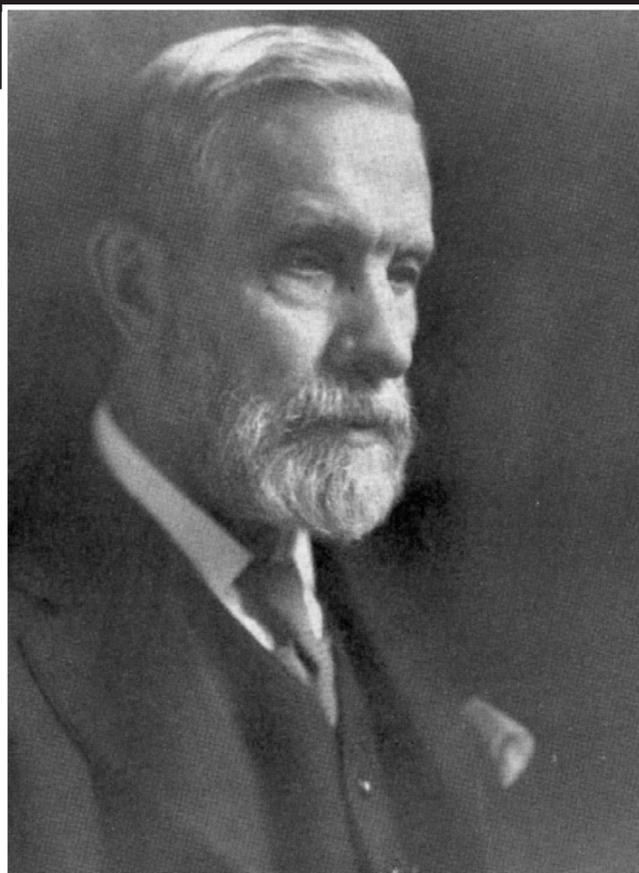


A Forgotten Hero

John Devoy



Compiled and edited by
James Durney, Mario Corrigan and Seamus Curran

A Forgotten Hero – John Devoy

Being largely a re-print of the booklet
'The Greatest of the Fenians – John Devoy,'
Issued by the John Devoy Memorial Committee in 1964.

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James Durney, Mario Corrigan and Seamus Curran

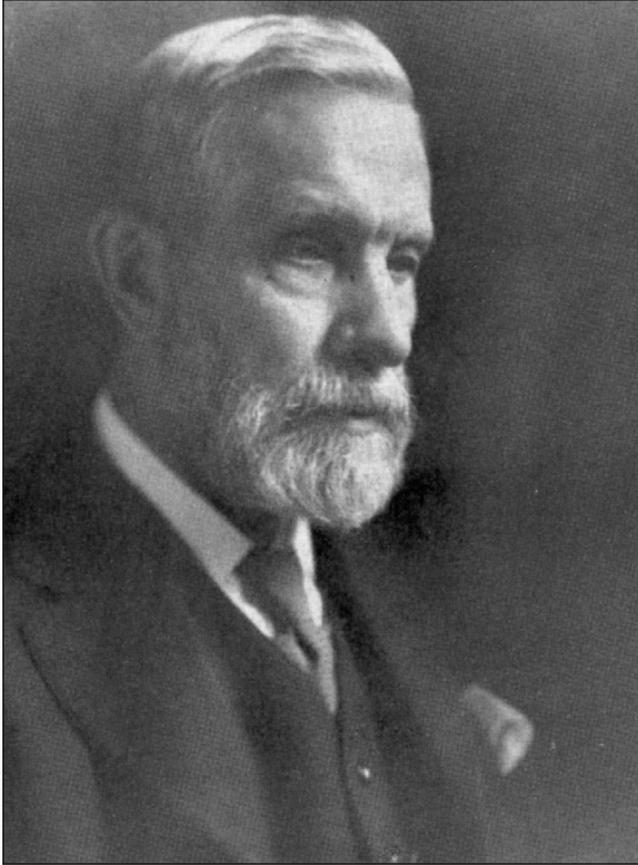
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Dedicated to
the people of Kill and Naas,
John Devoy and the original John Devoy Committee of 1964,
and to absent friends

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction <i>'A Forgotten Hero,'</i> by Seamus Curran	5
Original 1964 Booklet <i>'The Greatest of the Fenians - John Devoy'</i>	7
Foreword <i>by Michael Smyth</i>	8
The Man We Commemorate <i>by Stephen Rynne</i>	10
Extracts from newspapers 1924-1929 <i>The Leinster Leader, The Kildare Observer, The Irish Times</i>	26



John Devoy.

JOHN DEVOY MEMORIAL PROJECT

This booklet was compiled and edited by
James Durney, Mario Corrigan and Seamus Curran
for the purpose of raising funds
for a new memorial to the Fenian John Devoy.

Introduction

A FORGOTTEN HERO

By Seamus Curran

Recently while cleaning out his attic in Naas, Ger Swan came upon a number of letters written in longhand on the headed notepaper of *The Irish American Publishing Company*. These letters would prove to be of historical significance as they came from the hand of the Fenian leader John Devoy. The letters were written to his childhood sweetheart, Eliza Kilmurry, whom he was forced to leave behind prior to beginning his long absence as a political exile in America.

Born on 3 September 1842 in the townland of Greenhills, situated between the villages of Johnstown and Kill, John Devoy as a young man took an early interest in politics. At age nineteen he was sworn into the Fenian movement and later signed the National Petition, a plebiscite for self-determination for the Irish people. During the same year of 1861 Devoy served with the French Foreign Legion in Algeria. On his return to Ireland he was appointed by the Fenian leader, James Stephens, to the position of Fenian organiser in the Naas area and later as chief organiser of Irishmen serving in the British Army in Ireland.

As a committed Fenian Devoy endured many obstacles, including the British authorities, the bishops and informers. While attending mass in Naas he was castigated from the pulpit by the then parish priest Father Hughes, although Fenians like Devoy had the support of other priests who sympathised with Ireland's struggle for independence. During 1865 following a raid on *The Irish People* (a Fenian paper), incriminating evidence was discovered, including a letter from John Devoy to the editor. Devoy had previously submitted a number of articles to the paper under the pseudonym of "Allen Turfaitter." A warrant issued at a sitting of the Naas assizes for the arrest of Devoy forced him into hiding out in a number of houses in Dublin. Following some close encounters with the authorities he was eventually arrested at a Fenian gathering in the Pilsworth pub in James' Street, Dublin.

Found guilty at his trial Devoy was sentenced to 15 years penal servitude which was partly served in Irish and English jails. During 1871, having served part of his sentence, Devoy, with a number of Fenian prisoners, was granted an amnesty on a condition that they remain outside Ireland. Devoy chose America as his destination and shortly after arrived in New York with four fellow political prisoners aboard the steamship *The Cuba*. Having secured employment as a journalist with the *New York Herald* he set about achieving, along with fellow Fenians, the liberation of the country he had left behind. While living in flop houses in Lower Manhattan he spread the Fenian message, recruiting and organising a movement among the slums of the Lower East Side. He would become the eventual head of all Clan na Gael branches across America.

Some of the political plots Devoy was involved in included – the rescue of six Fenian prisoners from Freemantle prison in Western Australia aboard the *Catalpa* whaling ship; the financing and building of the first submarine invented by John Philip Holland, an emigrant from Liscannor, Co. Clare; he also helped to set up the Land League in Ireland with Michael Davitt. The relationship he developed with the German Consul General in New York, Count Von Bernstorff, would result in securing arms for the planned 1916 Rising. Devoy also supported and lent his backing to Michael Collins in the quest for the formation of the Irish Free State.

During 1897 Devoy, along with a number of American Irishmen, including Theodore Roosevelt, founded the American Irish Historical Society. Situated on Fifth Avenue along New York's museum mile the society has always taken an interest in Irish cultural affairs in the form of lectures, musical recitals and art exhibitions.

In July 1924, having spent 54 years as a political exile in America, John Devoy boarded the *President Harding* as it prepared to sail from New Jersey's Hoboken pier to Ireland. His American-Irish friend Harry Cunningham accompanied him on his journey. Hearing of Devoy's return, his childhood sweetheart Eliza Kilmurry wrote to him at his relations' address in Fairview. The letter came as a surprise to Devoy as he had heard some years earlier that she had died. He responded by visiting her home in Naas. During his time spent with Eliza she brought him to meet the local parish priest Fr. Norris. They also visited the nuns at the convent and the site where his home once stood at Greenhills. Three days prior to his meeting with Eliza he was a guest of honour in Croke Park for the opening of the Tailteann Games and received a very enthusiastic reception from a full stadium. President Cosgrave saluted him with a banquet in Dublin's Dolphin Hotel before his return to New York.

Following a memorable six weeks traveling around Ireland Devoy returned to New York on 6 September. Having renewed acquaintance with Eliza they continued to correspond with each other after he returned to America. Devoy now in old age would begin writing his memoirs, *Recollections of an Irish Rebel*. At the age of eighty-six, his health, which had been bad for a number of years, further deteriorated. His friend Harry Cunningham brought him for a short visit to Atlantic City where the sea air invigorated him. However, his health continued to decline and early on the morning of 29 September 1928 he died in a hotel room in Atlantic City in the presence of Harry Cunningham.

John Devoy's body was returned to New York for a funeral mass in Manhattan's Church of the Ascension, where the number of mourners forced the police to close adjacent streets. John Devoy would make one final journey to Ireland on the *President Harding*. His remains arrived in Dublin where he lay in state in City Hall before he was accorded a state funeral to Glasnevin Cemetery and laid to rest among his fellow Fenian comrades. John Devoy was considered by many, including Padraic Pearse, to be the greatest of the Fenians. Towards the end of his life he had lived to see the formation of the Free State he had so unselfishly dedicated his whole life to achieving.

[Original 1964 commemorative booklet, 'The Greatest of the Fenians – John Devoy.' Issued by the John Devoy Memorial Committee. Price 1/6]

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FOREWORD

The John Devoy Memorial Committee, of which I am chairman, has bestowed on me the privilege of writing the Foreword of this booklet. As a first comment I want to say that we are exceedingly proud of the task we have undertaken in honouring the memory of John Devoy and doing something to make him known to the rising generations. We feel, too, that in keeping Devoy's memory green, we help to focus attention on the Fenian movement of which he was the personification. The Fenian Rising of '67 was a brave but futile effort, yet Fenianism begot Sinn Fein and Sinn Fein carried the day. Anything that our Committee can do to honour Devoy and Fenianism might rightly be described as a "labour of gratitude."

John Devoy was born in 1842 at Kill, County Kildare, in a small cottage on the main road from Naas to Dublin. He died in America in 1928, having given almost seventy years of his life to secure the freedom of Ireland. The task which he shouldered was that which had been undertaken by numbers of previous generations, the breaking of English power in Ireland. How he acquitted himself of this task is told by Mr. Stephen Rynne in this booklet.

Mr. Rynne's biographical sketch is complete; I do not wish to add to it in this place. There are, however, some aspects of Devoy's patriotic career which stimulate me to comment. His tenacity and single-mindedness were, for example, extraordinary. His aloofness from things not connected with the Irish cause was altogether amazing.

Devoy's time as an active Fenian in Ireland was short; his time as an exile in America was, on the other hand, extremely long. The peculiar quality of tenacity he possessed served him as Fenian soldier, Fenian prisoner and Fenian exile. He was a man of one loyalty – Ireland. From the commencement of his time in America, he refused to be embroiled in the political life of that country. His sole aim was to apply himself to the work of harnessing all possible opposition against English interests in the U.S.A. To this end, he made friends with many men in high political life; Devoy's friends, it must be said, were all of one kind: enemies of England. He had great ability and he *could* have been a successful American politician had he so desired. He had no such ambition because his heart was ever in Ireland. Again, as an authority on world affairs, he *could* have commanded an editorial chair in one of the great American newspapers. His labours were not for sale. His talents were dedicated to his country's advantage and he was content to eke out a poor living by running propaganda weeklies, *The Irish Nation* and *Gaelic America*.

The '67 rising was a failure but, in a sense, the fight went on and the Fenians never laid down their arms. The Clan-na-Gael organisation of which John Devoy was leader, worked in the closest co-operation with the I.R.B. in this country. There was no dictation from America. It was recognised that the freedom all desired could only be won by the men and women of Ireland. The Irish-Americans made tremendous sacrifices and paid for guns and munitions "till it hurt." At Easter, 1916, John Devoy

announced the declaration of the Irish Republic to a large gathering of Irish people in New York. Tears of joy streamed down his face. He was the Fenian – almost the only one, certainly the greatest one – who lived long enough to see the fruits of freedom. How he returned to Ireland in 1924 and how he was welcomed, is told by Mr. Rynne. The old Fenian veteran died “fortified by the rites of the Catholic Church” (as the phrase runs), in September, 1928. His body lies where he would like it to be – in Glasnevin Cemetery. Irish and Irish-American admirers and friends combined to erect a monument marking the last resting place of the hero.

There is an echo of the indomitable character in the verse which appears on the mortuary card:

*“His life was a ceaseless protest
And his voice was a prophet’s cry
To be true to the Truth and faithful
Though the world were arrayed for the Lie.”*

This Foreword would be incomplete without a tribute to the members of the Committee of which I have the honour of being chairman.

The John Devoy Memorial Committee consists of men of various ages and occupations. Most, but not all, are Kildare men. Again, most, but not all, have National records: belonged to the Volunteers, served in brigades and did terms in prison. One member is a kinsman of John Devoy; two or three had the privilege of knowing him. Sons, grandsons and nephews of Fenians are represented. Amongst the younger men, we have soldiers of the National Army – language enthusiasts, worthy heirs of the Fenian and Sinn Fein heritage. Finally, many of the Committee members are in public life, serving on councils and committees in furtherance of the common good. I have perhaps, laid too much stress on the differences; there is a very definite bond of unity; admiration for John Devoy.

We are fortunate, too, in having outstanding Patrons – men who are nationally known and respected. Support for our projects has, of course, come from every section of society; there are no barriers, political or otherwise, where Fenianism and John Devoy are concerned.

What do we plan to do? First, and nearly finalised, is our determination to create a John Devoy Memorial Scholarship. The subject is almost definitely to be modern Irish History. We are persuaded that the idea of awarding a scholarship to a young Irish boy or girl would meet Devoy’s approval. Patriotism nowadays is best expressed in terms of holding our people and the scholarship will do something to serve that end. Second, but not yet finalised, is a plan to erect a simple monument at the site of Devoy’s old home. There is a suggestion that we have a park, or laid out grounds, on that site too – where at one time there were “rosebushes, intertwining laburnums and beds of luscious strawberries.” Finally, we will endeavour to make the name of John Devoy known to every adult and school child in Ireland. Indeed, the task of the Memorial Committee can be summarised as just that: to obtain lasting recognition of the “greatest of all of the Fenians.” We can, of course, do nothing without your support. We count on it.

*Michael Smyth.
1964.*

THE MAN WE COMMEMORATE

By Stephen Rynne

In his *Recollections*, John Devoy made claim with something of the boastfulness of a Saint Paul, that he had served the Irish Cause “to the best of my ability and judgment for sixty-seven years.” Born at Kill, County Kildare, on September 3rd, 1842, this long manhood period breaks down as five years a Fenian fighter, five years in jail and the rest – patriotic drudgery. He died in Atlantic City on September 29th, 1928. Readers of the *Recollections* and *Devoy's Post Bag* – the two major source books – soon come to the conclusion that Dying for Ireland is a method to be recommended for speed, comparative painlessness and (if the value be allowed in this exalted connection) cheapness. Living for Ireland in exile is to suffer from a malignant ailment in which disillusion, dejection and a series of disappointments are the painful symptoms. But Devoy was granite and “the greatest of Fenians” according to the greatest of the 1916 men, Padraic Pearse.

He is described by a New York *Herald* reporter as: “Five foot six in height with the square broad shoulders of a young Hercules, close-cropped hair surmounting a square massive forehead, small, deep-set blue eyes giving an assurance of shrewdness to a face massed in firmness by a compressed mouth and a strong chin.” The hair style was acquired in a British prison: Devoy and four other ex-convicts had just stepped off the steamship *Cuba* when the reporter made this pen picture. Here is a less flattering description of a later date from the man known to his Fenian and Parnellite victims as “Major Henri Le Caron,” or “The Prince of Spies.” “Forbidding of aspect, with a perpetual scowl upon his face, he immediately conveyed the idea of being a quarrelsome man, an idea sustained and strengthened by both his manner of speech and gruffness of voice,” the hostile witness concedes that Devoy had ability, but insists that he was ambitious, unscrupulous and had few friends.

He had many friends, all brothers-in-arms. He never married. “The Cause” was for him wife, family and home. Love of family and pride in ancestors, he had in abundance. When George Bernard Shaw took it on himself to state that the name Devoy was not Irish but French, the Fenian was incensed. He brought forward O’Devoys from the *Annals of the Four Masters* and the Seven Septs of Laois. But however he might brag of ancient lineage, the Devoys came down in the world together with the majority of native families when the Penal laws were enforced. His great-grandfather rented 235 acres; his grandfather, who farmed in Kill, had no more than 9 acres; his father started married life with half an acre – given rent free by the Dunnes, his wife’s family.

“To judge from the manner in which my father utilized this half acre, he would have been a thrifty farmer had he had enough land to till.” The *Recollections* describe a model horticultural plot beside the Naas-Kill road. Apart from vegetables to nourish the “steadily growing family,” there were “rosebushes, intertwining laburnums and

beds of luscious strawberries.” Devoy’s father did not, of course, support his family on the proceeds of the half acre; he worked as a navvy on the new railway line, broke stones for road construction and took occasional jobs from the great man of the locality, Lord Mayo.

After the Famine, the Devoy family moved to Dublin. The father got a steady job in Watkins’ brewery and John attended a school where patriotism was whacked out of the scholars by a cane-happy master. John stubbornly refused to sing *God Save the Queen* and received a crack on the head from the master. “I vowed that when I grew big enough I would lick him, but he died before I was able.” Not even Devoy’s greatest admirer could describe him as the forgiving sort.

For a short while young Devoy attended evening classes at the Catholic University and for an even shorter time he held a clerical job. Then he joined the Fenians – taking the oath in the editorial room of *The Nation* office. His father was angry: John was throwing himself into politics before finishing his education. Later, the son admitted the wisdom of this view, but at the time he was resolute in following his own bent. If he could not serve the Cause at home (and his irate father was prepared to block him), he would do so in another way. Aged nineteen, John set off for France to do an apprenticeship course in his chosen career of militant freedom fighter. He enlisted in the Zouaves in May, 1861. We have no details of his year with the Foreign Legion in Algeria. He was learning the soldier’s trade so that he could take up arms against the Irish enemy: the Foreign Legion was merely a means to an end.

The Fenian movement was started at a zero hour in Irish history: never since the defeat at the Boyne were spirits so low. Following the failure of the ‘Forty-Eight insurrection, came the Famine and then the terrible exodus. Charles Gavin Duffy, the Young Irelander, packed up and went to Australia; his parting words in *The Nation* are a classic of despondency. The darkest part of the picture was the treachery of the Irish Party members, Sadlier, Keogh and O’Flaherty. Trusted by the Catholic bishops and the moderate nationalists these men sold the pass. Their perfidy was rewarded by the Government. Keogh became a judge and soon afterwards showed his true colours in sentencing Fenians to penal servitude. Devoy was never able to disguise his hatred for the renegade. “Judge Keogh committed suicide by cutting his throat while drunk in a Belgian hotel. It was one of the few decent acts of his whole career.”

The leaders of the Young Ireland movement who fled to America after the collapse of the insurrection formed fighting organisations. Michael Doheny and John O’Mahony founded the Fenian Brotherhood in New York in 1855. Stephens and Luby founded the I.R.B. (Irish Republican Brotherhood). The name ‘Fenian’ quickly appealed to the newspaper men and caught on, as the name Sinn Fein was to catch on later. In Ireland the revolutionary secret societies (later to merge and become ‘Fenians’) were inactive; all the news that reached the exiles was bad news. At a small meeting held in New York, those present were asked to give financial help for the fight in Ireland; each man emptied his pockets and those dollars for guns were the first of millions to reach Ireland from the generous Irish-Americans.

In the summer of 1861, Terence Bellew McManus, one of the Young Irelanders who escaped to America from Van Dieman’s Land died in California. His comrades, calculating on the political reactions at home, decided to send his body to Ireland.

The plan paid enormous dividends: all Ireland, apart from loyalists, demonstrated sympathy for the man and the Cause. McManus's funeral from Cork to Glasnevin aroused the nation and proved to be a great recruiting event for Fenianism. The oath was administered to hundreds:

"I do solemnly swear allegiance to the Irish Republic now virtually established; that I will take up arms at a moment's notice to defend its integrity and independence; that I will yield implicit obedience to the commands of my superior officers, and finally I take this oath in the spirit of a true soldier of liberty. So help me God."

On his return from Algeria, Devoy was to become very familiar with that formula. The total strength of the oath-bound organisation is difficult to assess: Devoy gives 80,000 as the figure at the zenith of the movement; another estimate is as high as 100,000. It was no part of a secret society to divulge its strength; we must be satisfied with approximations. Organisation began at the top: one man was sworn in and made a "Centre;" he was empowered to swear in others to form a "Circle." Regulations laid down that no Fenian was to know other members outside his own section of the Circle but the rule was largely ignored. In Dublin, where Devoy was most active, there were 8,000 to 10,000 Fenians, and the secret sign of touching elbows was much in use wherever men congregated. Any place, any time was the occasion for Fenian recruiting or consolidating; the consecration of a Kilkenny church served as well as the races at the Curragh, or Punchestown.

The Fenian movement began to flourish. For a time at least Government vigilance was lax, and for a time the Church's condemnation of oath-taking had little effect. The population, still over the six million mark, consisted largely of malcontents prepared to support an armed rising. The Civil War had ended in America and Irishmen who had fought in it were back, trained and ready to fight for their native country. Hardly ever before were anti-English feelings so high in America due to interference in the late war. But the most favourable factor of all was the Fenian force in the British army. Of the 26,000 regular troops stationed in Ireland, sixty per cent were Irish and it is estimated that 8,000 of these were Fenians. Of the militia force of 12,000, one half were Fenians, while the army in England had some 7,000 men bound by the oath.

Devoy was appointed by Stephens to take charge of the Fenian organisation in the British army in Ireland. He concentrated on the Dublin barracks and the Curragh Camp. The work assigned to him was not only congenial, but a joy. In his autobiography he tells lovingly of his "crack Fenian regiments" and of discovering rebels amongst the kilted Highlanders; he is never done praising the soldiers for their sincerity, sobriety and spirit of discipline. The Fenian oath was administered in many strange places from taprooms and roadside ditches to the very sentry boxes where soldiers stood on duty, rifle in hand.

It did not take much, if any, persuasion to make a sworn Fenian out of an Irish soldier in the British army. Most of the young men had taken the Queen's shilling as a last desperate resort. They, or their relatives, were victims of famine and eviction; their hearts were full of vengeful feelings and they had neither qualms nor fears about joining the Fenians. Devoy based all his hopes of a successful insurrection on a mutiny.

Lack of arms and trained men were, he argued, the cause of past failures, And now, at last, there were many inadequately guarded arsenals and thousands of soldiers ready to change sides.

In 1863 and 1864 – a hundred years ago now – Ireland was prepared to put up a formidable fight against the British, such a fight as might have resulted in freedom fifty years before it came. But James Stephens, the “Head Centre,” procrastinated: “Next year is the year of action.” The months went by and grew into years and the chances of a successful rising evaporated.

British soldiers openly singing *The Rising of the Moon*, easily recognisable Americans suspiciously active – there was no hiding the fact that something was brewing. The Government decided to act; the informers got busy and the Fenian leaders were marked men. In September, 1865, *The Irish People* office was raided, the paper seized and everyone found on the premises arrested. John Devoy kept out of harm’s way in Naas and Stephens went into hiding. But two months later, “The Captain,” as Stephens was called, was discovered, arraigned before the magistrate and then held in Richmond prison to await trial. A rescue plan was immediately formulated; Devoy was in the thick of it. His first-hand account of how the scheme succeeded is one of the most sensational chapters in the *Recollections*. The well-planned, well-executed rescue had excellent effects on public morale. “The people were wild with delight. Men who had till then looked with open hostility or cold indifference on Fenianism were seized with a sudden enthusiasm...” It seemed that some action should take place *now*, but Stephens in his new hiding place still hesitated; he was in favour of waiting three weeks, or a month.

The Government roused itself in earnest early the following year. In a few weeks after the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, the jails were filled: Devoy estimated the number of prisoners as 3,000. He himself was lodged in Mountjoy jail. On instruction, he pleaded guilty at his trial: he was to be rescued so that he could take his place when the shooting started. There was no rescue. Devoy was sentenced to 15 years penal servitude.

Mountjoy, Millbank, Portland, Chatham – he could have written an absorbing Jail Journal had he the mind to do so. But imprisonment for this man of endurance meant exasperation more than suffering: he was removed from the scene of action and there was nothing he could do to further the Cause – that summarised his feelings. He is half humorous, wholly bitter about the troubles of going to Confession. Some of the prison chaplains insisted on asking questions about the oath and after much argument, refused absolution (“Father, I won’t argue politics on my knees any more ...”). Devoy was four months in the punishment ward for attempting to escape (he knocked down a warden with a brush handle) but makes no complaints. He has, however, immense sympathy for his fellow Fenian prisoners; he couldn’t bear to think of John O’Leary, Luby, and Kickham picking oakum with their delicate hands. The food, he records, was bad and insufficient and big men, such as O’Donovan Rossa, starved. For light relief there were sock darning parties in Chatham; the prisoners were allowed to talk and the banter was good fun.

Devoy was in jail when the rising took place in 1867. The story of its failure does not belong in this place. Devoy, who was well informed on the situation even though

imprisoned, reserves his greatest laments for the Fenian regiments of the British army. These had been drafted out of Ireland the previous year; they were in Devoy's opinion "the right arm of the movement." For consolation there was the thought that the rising had, on Gladstone's admission, changed the whole course of English-Irish relations.

The Fenian prisoners were released before their sentences had expired. This happy turn of events was brought about by the Amnesty agitation whose prime mover was John Nolan, now almost a forgotten patriot. The terms of the Amnesty were that the released men were to go abroad and stay there until their full sentences had expired. Most of them went to the United States of America. Men and Cause prospered in that Land of Opportunity as they would never have prospered otherwise. England learns lessons slowly: the Young Ireland exiles caused mischief in the States and when they were joined by the Fenians, mischief grew into menace. Devoy was amongst the first batch of prisoners to arrive, January, 1871. There were five of them on the steamship *Cuba* and they became known in revolutionary circles as "The Cuba Five." Two of the men, Devoy and Rossa, were destined to fan the flames of anti-English feelings in America for decades to come.

There were three Fenian factions extant in America when the *Cuba* arrived in New York; all three made a bid to capture and make political use of the newcomers. The "Five" were not to be easily coaxed, or easily bribed. "Do they think," Devoy said to a reporter, "that by dangling the dollars before us they can influence us? We are not children, nor have we been in prison for the Cause to fall into the hands of a buyer." For a man of 29, Devoy's judgement was remarkably sound.

When the next batch of Fenians arrived from prison, there was no gainsaying the parades, banquets, addresses of welcome and ballyhoo. The Tammany Hall branch of the Fenian movement collected \$22,000 for the exiles, "but about half of it was spent on the parade..." They were invited to Washington as guests of the city. During their stay, President Grant expressed a wish to see them. It was, Devoy delightedly narrates, something of a "slap in the face to England." They accepted the invitation with alacrity. Devoy likened President Grant's handshake to the motion of a pump handle.

Being fêted by admiring Americans made little appeal to him. He felt that the pressing business was to achieve unity between the warring factions. With some of his friends, he founded a new organisation, the Irish Confederation. It came to nothing, making confusion worse confounded. It was not until Devoy made use of the already existing organisation, Clan na Gael, that he secured a political instrument to suit all needs. The Clan's business (to quote P. S. O'Hegarty's introduction to the *Post Bag*) was "to keep a firm grip on Irish-American opinion, to keep it 'right' on the national issue, to organise anti-English American opinion, and unceasingly to combat the proposals appearing frequently in the press, for an Anglo-American *rapprochement*." The Clan had no say in the policy of the home organisation, but sent help to Ireland when required and kept in touch all the time. "In his little office in New York Devoy vetted everyone who went to America on any sort of national mission or national pretence, and contrary-wise also he reported back on visitors in the reverse direction."

Meanwhile he earned his living by journalism, as many of the Fenian exiles did

also. He was on the staff of the *Herald* for nine years, being eventually dismissed for supporting Parnell. For a time he was connected with various New York and Chicago newspapers, then started his own paper, the *Irish Nation*. In 1903 he founded the weekly *Gaelic American* which he edited until his death.

The Fenian rising had been a complete military failure. There had been fiasco after fiasco both at home and in America: the miserable failure of the *Erin's Hope* expedition, the Fenian raids on Canada. It was difficult for the exiles – Devoy, Rossa, John Boyle O'Reilly – to persevere in hopefulness. Political exiles always quarrel; the Fenians were no exception. Leaders were deposed and others went into retirement. “But they patched things up,” to quote O’Hegarty, “and they went on. They were a people’s organisation, firmly based on the things the people in their inmost souls believed in, and they never doubted, never faltered. And their sons and their grandsons justified their faith.”

In America there was no scarcity of fellow workers in the Cause, but it was necessary to move cautiously and to act judiciously. The new scene was full of dangerous, hare-brained characters. The Irish independence movement threw up countless brave men, prepared to make sacrifices, and to suffer; the idealists were reckoned in thousands and men of intellectual status were numerous. The hard heads were scarce all the time. John Devoy for all his lust to damage England, was hard headed and even moderate. The wild schemes of the Irish-American Fenians often made him wryly smile.

There was a plan to seize Gibraltar from the British by a body of I.R.B. men and ex-soldiers. The Russo-Turkish war of 1877 seemed to offer an opportunity of a Fenian-Russian alliance; Devoy was one of a delegation to the Russian ambassador in Washington in this matter. Afghanistan unrest suggested itself as a chance to make an alliance with native rulers against the common enemy. Rossa organised what was called a “Skirmishing” fund with the object of subsidising any party or any one prepared to strike at England. Its most harmless plan was to kidnap the Lord Lieutenant and use him as a hostage; its most dangerous project, the use of dynamite. Devoy and O’Leary frowned on Rossa’s venture and C. J. Kickham, chairman of the I.R.B. Supreme Council, questioned the morality of dynamite plots. But Rossa went ahead.

The air was thick with conspiracy. Clan members used a cipher when communicating; the United Brotherhood had secret signs of recognition. Dr. Carroll of Philadelphia keeps up correspondence with Devoy, addressing him variously as ‘Dixon,’ ‘Wallace,’ ‘Charlotte’ and ‘Carrie.’ “Dear Carrie, I hasten to tell you that Miss Brunnell is rapidly regaining her health and strength,” the spinster in the news being the I.R.B. Mention of “drapery and agricultural arrangements” conveyed hidden information of arms for the fight in Ireland. Devoy respected this secrecy saying that they were on “serious revolutionary work.” There were, of course, nearly as many British spies in America as at home.

There were two spectacular conspiracies in the early part of Devoy’s exile: Holland’s submarine and the *Catalpa* rescue. John P. Holland, a Fenian member, emigrated to America in 1872 and there carried out experiments in submarine construction. He offered his invention to the Clan and, after investigations, the offer was taken up. Some \$60,000 were paid out in the hope that a successful submarine would

be launched and that it would be used against England by any of the Powers at war with her, or by the Fenians themselves. It was not until 1898 that Holland's submarine was successfully launched under the aegis of the American Government. Nonetheless, Fenianism is in the pedigree of every submarine on the high seas.

The rescue of the six imprisoned Fenians in Freemantle, Australia, is one of the most dramatic stories of the period. It has been the subject of several books and contains the stuff of a film at least as enthralling as "Mutiny on the Bounty." The *Catalpa* rescue plan was entrusted to a committee of which Devoy was the chairman. When sufficient funds were raised, the whaler, *Catalpa*, was purchased, a crew hired and an outstanding man selected as captain. Equipped for a two year's voyage, the ship put out to sea in April, 1875; the greatest secrecy was observed, no one but the committee having the least suspicion of the purpose of the mission. To say all went well is to absurdly simplify an exciting adventure and to compress – perhaps unfairly – storm, mutiny, miscarriages, betrayals, near disasters and bad luck. But the *Catalpa* and the rescued prisoners were back in America by August of the following year. Cheering crowds and the firing of cannon greeted the ship in America. When the good news reached Ireland, there were torchlight processions in Dublin and Cork. And the London *Times* lectured the United States Government on the gravity of allowing its flag to be used to cover the escape of British prisoners. The credit of the whole success story goes of course to John Devoy.

As time went on in this second phase of Fenianism, he began to see that military action at home and exploits such as the *Catalpa* rescue were not sufficient. It was desirable to broaden the basis of the struggle for freedom. Parnell was showing himself to be a fine parliamentary leader and Michael Davitt, recently released from prison, was determined to fight landlordism. Devoy had his eye on both men and received reports on them. "I had a long chat with Parnell," wrote J. J. O'Kelly, a Fenian famed for gun running, "... a man of promise. I think he ought be supported. He is cool – extremely so and resolute." A few months later Dr. Carroll went to Europe and made it his business to meet the Home Rule leader; he was favourably impressed. Parnell, on his side, recognised the strength of the Fenian movement and saw that if the two forces were fused there would be a strong hope for Irish independence in a short while. Devoy sent a cable to Parnell offering the support of the Clan, subject to certain conditions. Some time later, Devoy went to Europe where he conferred with Parnell in Boulogne. A basis for the famous New Departure was reached and at subsequent meetings in Ireland, details were hammered out. (Ireland, incidentally, was out of bounds for ex-convict Devoy, but he managed to escape detection).

The New Departure probably meant more for Davitt's Land League than Parnell's Home Rule. Davitt was invited by the Clan to visit America soon after his release from jail; he went on a lecture tour and met the exiled Fenians in secret conferences. With Devoy, he planned the Land League – Devoy is justly recognised as the co-founder of the new political instrument – then returned to Ireland to put the plan into operation. By 1880, the New Departure was in full swing: Parnell, Davitt and Devoy rallying Home Rulers, Leaguers and Fenians to a united camp. Parnell went to America and received a tremendous welcome. The longed for freedom would soon come; the tricolour would float over Dublin Castle. Mercifully, Devoy and the other

passionate patriots could not see the future: the downfall of Parnell, the splits at home and the feuds in America.

Devoy's doggedness – a quality not generally shared by his confrères – stood to him in these disappointments. Lulls in the independence movement in Ireland were times of frayed tempers amongst the Irish-Americans. But Devoy was never a man to back out of a thing because of weariness or disgust. When a split occurred in the Clan, he waged a ruthless war against his opponents. Devoy's pertinacity was matched by his zeal and violence in dealing with those he considered were injuring the Cause. The breach in the Clan was not healed until 1900. The reader of the *Post Bag* is continually astonished at the slow motion. The internal controversies dragged on endlessly. Fenians got on each other's nerves; there were quarrels, defections and consequent loss of popular support. The reader asks himself "Why did a man of Devoy's abilities bother?" He was honest, a man without price – not a salaried agitator living in comfort; the work was mostly humdrum, and the remuneration small.

The little office in New York was a sort of G.H.Q. for Fenian conspiracies, news and bulletins being received from many quarters. Militarists wrote from Dublin, parliamentarians from London, political refugees from Paris; reports came from places as large as Glasgow, Sheffield and Cork and as small as Milltown Malbay; while Kickham lived, Mullinahone was on the map, the interchange of correspondence between American cities, especially Philadelphia and Boston, was enormous, and finally, when there were rumours of wars, reports poured in from Fenians in foreign countries.

The going and coming across the Atlantic is astonishing. Irish-Americans laid down tools and set off for Ireland in furtherance of the Cause; hot-footed messengers arrived from Ireland in New York – messengers usually in dire need of money, food and shelter. Devoy was continually giving "loans" or donations. He was extremely generous, often befriending a new arrival whose record of Fenian loyalty was questionable. Sifting the cranks from the gold-diggers and spies from the genuine patriots was all in the day's work. During Devoy's fifty-seven years in America, an immense number of people called to see him seeking advice, or support, or frankly asking for funds to carry on their organisations. He personified exiled Ireland.

The period between the death of Parnell and the rise of Sinn Fein was long but not fruitless. The Clan used every opportunity to drive a wedge between England and America, thus keeping up "bad blood" relations. A controversy with Canada in connection with inshore fisheries was made the most of – if the international issue did not end up in a war, it was not the Clan's fault. The Boer War seemed another chance to cause mischief and the Irish-Americans planned to send men and arms to the front. British imperial policy was watched as it probably was never watched before and the Clan, with Devoy at an editor's desk, let nothing pass unchallenged.

The real gap in continuity, however, was the lack of political enterprise at home. John Redmond and the Irish Party inspired no confidence. The revolutionary men were, for a time, all Fenian veterans – old survivors holding the fort. There was a good deal of leeway waiting until the change of guard came with the rise of Sinn Fein. The Gaelic League was supported by the Clan in the usual practical way of raising funds. Arthur Griffith's paper, *The United Irishman*, was subsidised, Padraic Pearse went to America and got financial help for his idealistic college, Saint Enda's. Devoy was in

touch with famous Irish people working for causes of various kinds: Douglas Hyde, William Bulfin, Major MacBride, Mrs. Stopford Green and Lady Gregory. The Irish Literary movement, incidentally, made slight appeal to the tough Fenian; for him, very little of Yeats and less of Synge went a long way.

The Clan was far from being a benevolent organisation ready to give its blessing to every Irish activity. At the convention where unity was achieved, the Clan declared itself for physical force. “The object of the Clan is the complete independence of the Irish people and the establishment of an Irish Republic ...” It stood by the principles of Wolfe Tone and Emmet and its members were pledged not to aid the Home Rule movement in anyway.

It was at this convention in 1900 that Daniel Cohalan’s name first appears. He was to be Devoy’s closest associate from that time henceforth. Cohalan was born in America of Irish parents; he was an ardent American but the dearest cause he had was Irish freedom. He and Devoy were realists and fighters; their campaigning in the political fields of America and Ireland shaped history. For Devoy, the gain of a new ally was offset by the loss of many older ones: his pen was kept very busy writing obituary articles in the *Gaelic American* where he deplored the death of fellow Fenians. When O’Donovan Rossa died in 1915, Devoy took charge of the funeral arrangements. The body was sent to Ireland and the Cause was served in almost the same manner as by the McManus funeral of 1861. Thousands of uniformed Irish Volunteers and men of the Citizen Army marched behind the hearse; Padraic Pearse gave the memorable graveside oration, a great tribute to Rossa and an even greater tribute to Fenianism.

World War I was a “now or never” opportunity and the Clan set about making plans for an Irish rising to end all risings. Devoy and Cohalan were already in action during the very first month of the war. The paramount need was the arming of the Irish Volunteers. A Clan committee, which included Devoy, presented Ireland’s case to the German Ambassador at Washington. It was made clear that the pressing need was for arms and trained officers and no money was required. The Ambassador Count Von Bernstorff, promised to send the application to Berlin. So that there would be no miscarriage, the Clan sent a trustworthy member to Berlin also; he delivered messages to the Minister of War and, although travel in Europe was then extremely difficult, he managed to reach Ireland where he conferred with the revolutionary, Tom Clarke. Roger Casement who was in America at the outbreak of the war, drew up an Address to the Kaiser, requesting help for Ireland and praying for a German victory; it was signed by members of the Clan, John Devoy being the first to place his signature. A consistent separationist, Devoy was delighted with the prospects of a German-Irish alliance.

The Clan was “back in business” and there was real military work ready to hand once more. Roger Casement’s mission was supported by Devoy from the very start. There was a steady flow of funds for military purposes from 1914 until the Rising broke out. The total amount of money sent to Ireland at this period is difficult to calculate. Devoy in a 1921 speech, said, “We sent fully \$100,000 to Ireland and we have been sending money there from that day to this.” \$25,000 went to Dublin immediately before Easter Week; Casement’s special venture was financed to the extent of

about \$8,000 and in general, as the prospects of a fight increased, members of the Clan contributed – in Devoy’s words – “till it hurt.” It would be impossible to exaggerate the help given by the Irish-Americans to the cause of Irish freedom.

If the first need of the war years was to prepare for a rising on Irish soil, the second was to keep America neutral. In this respect, Devoy and Cohalan worked at high pressure to offset the activities of British propagandists. But the pair fought a losing battle. It was also, indeed, something of a lone battle: the German cause was feebly supported by the German-Americans. German diplomacy, too, was out-matched by British and made little impression on the Wilson administration. President Woodrow Wilson was a complete Anglophile who, according to Devoy, had “imbibed with his mother’s milk an implacable hatred of the Irish.” The editor of the *Gaelic American* used no half measures in attacking his enemies and “Woodrow Wilson was the meanest and most malignant man who ever filled the office of President of the United States.” The President, said to read the marked columns in the *Gaelic American* with angry interest, never forgave Devoy and Cohalan for their opposition, in due time, the President took his revenge on Judge Cohalan.

The Clan was by now a force in American politics; the men who founded it had come a long way from Fenianism. But for Devoy the Irish cause ranked highest all through his career. He was the recognised “Grand Old Man” of the physical force movement and the first to be told I.R.B. secrets. In February, 1916, he was informed by the Military Council that the insurrection was to take place at Easter. He was instructed to confer with the German representatives and secure a shipload of arms to be landed in Ireland on the eve of the outbreak. The Clan had at this time no funds (every cent having already gone to Ireland) and no chance at all of gun running from America; the onus of sending an arms ship rested entirely on the Germans. Devoy was trusted by the German authorities who consulted him about people, usually spies, who came along with brilliant ideas allegedly favourable to a German victory. Communications between Devoy and the German Consul General in New York intensified when news of the forthcoming insurrection came in. The landing of arms between April 20th and 23rd was arranged in detail and a message sent to Berlin on April 18th. On that day, the United States secret service raided the office of the Consul General and confiscated the correspondence files. Devoy’s letters were turned over to the British Embassy – the Wilson Administration ideas on neutrality being remarkably elastic. Although the British Government was aware of the plan to land arms, the *Aud* with its rifles and machine guns reached Fenit Bay. The failure of that expedition does not have to be told here.

Devoy, aged 74 in 1916, was aching to get to Ireland and resume the fight that had been broken off in 1867. Rossa’s widow wrote to him early in April, begging him to remain in America. “To throw yourself into the midst of things in Ireland would be the fulfillment of a beautiful dream ...” She urges him to resist that dream as a temptation. The Easter Week outbreak roused the Old Fenian and his excitement and sense of helplessness were extreme. Later, in Dublin, he was to tell how he tried to get over for the fight by getting the naturalisation papers of a man who resembled him. They were finally refused, and the negotiations broke down. “He regretted,” (the report of his speech continues) “that he hadn’t succeeded in getting over and being shot with

Tom Clarke and Sean MacDermott.” The *Recollections* conclude with the Proclamation of the Irish Republic. Devoy, the reader is certain, had a reverential awe for every word in that inspiring manifesto.

The Rising brought about many changes. Fenianism gave place to Sinn Fein and the old movement had no value except as a source of inspiration and a headline in valour and tenacity. Sinn Fein ideals were different from Fenian ones; I.R.A. methods much more thorough than the older ones. When Tom Clarke faced the firing squad, the last of the active Fenians in Ireland was removed from the fight. The young men engaged in guerilla warfare put into it new zest and skills.

In America, the Clan continued to help in every way it could. There was no slackening in activities: Irish Race Conventions, fund-raising drives, financial assistance for Roger Casement’s trial, help for the victims of the Black-and-Tan atrocities and continual attempts to undermine the Wilson administration which was so hostile to the Irish cause. But America was in the World War and the Clan had not the free hand it used to have. The “Troubles” in Ireland were of little consequence in a war torn world. The slow manoeuvring for advantageous position was no longer easy for the Irish-Americans and, to a man of Devoy’s age, it was hard to see how best to tackle new situations. There were critics at home beginning to murmur that the Clan was out of touch and that Devoy had gone beyond his best.

Sinn Fein’s victory in the 1918 election encouraged the Clan and the kindred organisation, the Friends of Irish Freedom, to hold an Irish Race Convention in Philadelphia. Cardinal Gibbons gave an address and a resolution drawn up by Devoy and Cohalan called on the Paris Peace Conference to “apply to Ireland the great doctrine of national self-determination.” The major purpose of the Irish organisations after this was to implement that resolution. Devoy and Cohalan were dedicated to the idea of getting a hearing for Ireland at the Conference and also an investigation made into British brutality in Ireland. In addition, the League of Nations being Wilson’s pet project, the Clan leaders did all in their power to sabotage it. Devoy and Cohalan found themselves, as was to be expected, right in the hottest parts of American political tussles.

In February, 1919, de Valera escaped from Lincoln prison and succeeded in making his way to America. He came on a propaganda campaign and to raise money for the fight in Ireland. He was soon inevitably in touch with Devoy. At first all went well and plans were made for an Irish Bond drive and other campaigns. Gradually, relationship between de Valera and the Clan leaders became strained, leading eventually to a complete break. “Sinn Fein idealism and Irish-American politics were uneasy bedfellows,” wrote Desmond Ryan in *The Phoenix Flame*. His account of the bitter quarrel is filled with such sad commentary as: “sordid and prolonged wrangle that split the Irish movement in the U.S.A. ... mud-slinging, washing of dirty linen ...” The causes of ill feeling between the Sinn Fein leaders (de Valera had been joined by others in the movement) and the Clan leaders reduce themselves to the fact that the men from Ireland would not take the advice of the men on the spot. It is understandable that the Sinn Fein leaders were somewhat “heady” as a result of the great advances at home – Dáil Eireann set up and practically the whole country prepared to back the War of Independence. From the Devoy-Cohalan angle the main issue of

the quarrel was that the accredited representatives of the Irish Republic wanted to band Irish-Americans into a single organisation whose first allegiance would be to Ireland; the Clan leaders held that the Irish-Americans could exert influence in American politics only as American citizens and they questioned de Valera's right to dominate the Irish in the States.

Which side was right in the de Valera-Devoy and Cohalan quarrel? Everyone nowadays would be glad to beg that question – to talk of a clash of idealism, to explain away the bitterness by the emotional tensions of these years of Irish travail and to make excuses for the viciousness that comes when 'one word borrows another.' "And while our frenzy lasted, we forgot Ireland" is the poignant comment of Dr. McCartan in his book, *With de Valera in America*. It would be pleasing to say that the scars left after this battle soon healed; in actual fact they remained open wounds all through Devoy's lifetime.

The Truce and the peace conference following it were received with joy in America. Devoy and Cohalan buried the hatchet for the occasion and both sent messages of congratulation to de Valera. Devoy's telegram began thus, "Permit the oldest active Fenian living to congratulate you and Dáil Eireann ...". But the Clan leaders were in bad odour and there was no response to their friendly move. Not to be left out in the cold, the Clan sent a member to Ireland to talk over Irish and American relations and to present a plan for future co-operation. He saw Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins and reported back to Devoy. Collins had a great respect for Judge Cohalan's ability, but – Devoy owns up – "finds fault with a lot of the things that I did and said."

Devoy was deeply disappointed in the Anglo-Irish Agreement, but not so stirred as to give his support to those who opposed it. When the Split came which resulted in the civil war, he sided with the Treaty-ites. If he was an 'out-and-outer,' he was able to console himself with the Parnell dictum that 'no man can set limits to the onward march of a nation' and he believed that the Free State would go onwards to "the only goal that is worth having – to the Irish Republic." He proved right in that belief.

His work was done. He had helped to build up many military organisations and he had lent his powerful support to Stephens, O'Leary, Parnell, Davitt, Pearse, Casement and the Sinn Fein leaders who came after them. As a worker in the Cause he was an inspiration and encouragement to men born long after the Fenian rising. "We were," said a man who had fought in a Flying Column, "always inspired by the fact that there was a John Devoy, even though he was 3,000 miles away." It could well be that an I.R.A. man filled with idealism as many of them were, would fight harder and run more risks so that the old Fenian in America would live to see Ireland free.

In August, 1924, John Devoy returned to Ireland and stayed for six weeks. He told reporters that it was 58 years since he lived in this country and 45 years since his last visit in 1879. The occasion of his trip was Aonach Tailteann, the first ‘party,’ or celebration, given by the newly created Irish Free State. The old Fenian – “a venerable figure wrapt in the dignity of honourable years,” in the flowery language of the *Independent* journalist – was accorded a State reception. When he landed in Cobh, troops presented arms; at the Tailteann Games, he sat beside the Governor General. The meeting of Devoy and Tim Healy at this ceremonious event was watched by a huge crowd of spectators; as the old men shook hands, Croke Park resounded with thunderous applause. Devoy stood silently with an impassive expression. He wore dark glasses because he had had several operations for cataracts in the recent past. That night, he got another ovation at a banquet in the Metropole restaurant. The short speech he made in return was modest and hopeful. He was, he said, 82 years of age, but he hoped to see all present differences healed amongst the Irish people and perfect unity prevailing not only in the Twenty-Six Counties, but on every square inch of Irish soil. Asked if he would soon make a return visit, he grimly said that the next time he came it would be feet foremost to be carried to Glasnevin.

During his time in Ireland, he visited old scenes including the prisons where he had been incarcerated and Independent House which stands on the site of the *Nation* office where he had taken the Fenian oath in ‘61. The least sentimental of men and a man always with emotion under control, tears filled his eyes when he saw Irish soldiers in green uniforms. He and Dr. Mark Ryan were the only two survivors to live to see the flag which was beaten to the dust in the Fenian Rising now raised and flying over Dublin Castle in the sight of all.

Old and infirm, Devoy wanted to feast his eyes on all he could whilst back in the Old Land. He stayed with his friends the Rice family, in Monaghan and told a reporter that the four days he spent in that place “were the most pleasant of all my life” – a statement filled with pathos remembering how lonely his life had been. He went, of course, to his native place, Kill, and looked up the surviving friends of his boyhood. People who remember that visit express astonishment at Devoy’s memory for place names and details of the locality. The little house where he was born and reared had gone, but the old man brought his friends along and traced out the foundations.

On the eve of his departure, a banquet was arranged in his honour. President Cosgrave attended and a number of admirers including Sean McGarry, Joseph McGrath, Sean Milroy, P. S. O’Hegarty and Pearse Beaslai. The President’s tribute – “No man deserves greater thanks from the nation” – was followed by others as laudatory. They presented him with a silver casket with an inscription in Irish. But his response was a little disappointing: he recalled Easter Week and his regret that he had not sacrificed his life in that glorious insurrection; he told how he had passed through more agony of mind from 1919 onwards than he had ever endured in his whole life. As a patriot’s swan song, Devoy’s last public words in Ireland are profoundly sad.

Back in New York, Devoy returned to the editing of the *Gaelic American*. He also set about the writing of his memoirs, the *Recollections*, so high in praise of fellow Fenians, so modest and self-effacing about his own work. He died practically penni-

less, in 1928. There were world-wide notices of his passing and it would be possible to summarise his career by culling from the numerous obituaries, but it would be only to underline his extraordinary single-mindedness. The London *Times* notice, however, if Devoy had the selecting, would serve as the perfect epitaph. He is summed up as “the most bitter and persistent, as well as the most dangerous enemy of this country which Ireland had produced since Wolfe Tone.”

“THE BOLD FENIAN MEN”

(The Fenian rising took place on the 5th March, 1867. John Devoy was in jail at that time, but he had information of the coming event. On the night following the rising there commenced a snowstorm which lasted almost without intermission for twelve days and nights. Devoy climbed up to his cell window and stared out at the falling snow. He tells in his Recollections of his anguish and how the words and the refrain of “The Bold Fenian Men” came sadly back to his mind).

See who comes over the red-blossomed heather,
Their green banners kissing the pure mountain air,
Heads erect, eyes to the front, stepping proudly together,
Sure freedom sits throned on each pure spirit there.

Down the hill twining,
Their blessed steel shining,
Like rivers of beauty that flow from each glen,
From mountains and valley,
‘Tis Liberty’s rally—
Out and make way for the bold Fenian men!

Our prayers and our tears they might have scoffed and derided,
They’ve shut out God’s sunlight from spirit and mind.

Our foes were united and we were divided,
We met and they scattered our ranks to the wind.

But once more returning,
Within our veins burning
The fires that illumined dark Aherlow glen:
We raise the old cry anew,
Slogan of Conn and Hugh;
Out and make way for the bold Fenian men!

**We've men from the Nore, from the Suir and the Shannon,
Let the tyrants come forth, we'll bring force against force.
Our pen is the sword and our voice is the cannon,
Rifle for rifle and horse against horse.
We've made the false Saxon yield
Many a red battlefield;
God on our side, we will triumph again:
Pay them back woe for woe,
Give them back blow for blow –
Out and make way for the bold Fenian men!**

**Side by side for the cause have our forefathers battled,
When our hills never echoed the tread of a slave;
In many a field where the leaden hail rattled,
Through the red gap of glory they marched to the grave.
And those who inherit
Their name and their spirit,
Will march 'neath the banners of Liberty then;
All who love foreign law –
Native or Sassanach –
Must out and make way for the bold Fenian men!**

DEVROY AND THE LANGUAGE

When Douglas Hyde wrote that “the Fenians never seemed to recognise the Irish language,” Devoy’s pride in the Movement was touched to the quick. He argued that John O’Mahony, one of the founders of Fenianism, was an Irish scholar and that amongst the rank and file there was a widespread desire to revive the language. He attended an Irish class himself from 1858 to 1861, “but,” he records, “most of the members dropped away after a time because they got too busy in Fenianism.”

Everyone is familiar with the tag, “Compulsory Irish,” but when John Devoy was a young man “Compulsory English” was the law of the land.

“I was only one among many who wanted to learn the language and to see it revived. When only 9 years of age I bought an Irish Primer. When 14, I invested in a lesson book and dictionary. I knew many Dublin men who acquired a fair knowledge of Irish in the same way and through talking to Connachtmen on the way to England to reap the harvest, though the harvestmen were reluctant to talk Irish except amongst themselves. The idea had already become widespread that Irish was a badge of inferiority, and schoolboys in many parts of Connacht had to carry, hung from the buttonholes of their jackets, small sticks on which the parents cut a notch for every word of Irish spoken in their hearing at home, and the schoolmaster gave them a slap for each notch.”

[Included at the end of the original booklet
was a financial appeal for subscriptions]

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EXTRACTS FROM
The Leinster Leader, The Kildare Observer,
AND *The Irish Times* NEWSPAPERS

**(As in the above most spellings and grammar retained
as in the original texts.)**

The Leinster Leader 9 August 1924

**FIGHTING IRISH EDITOR
FAMOUS CO. KILDARE MAN**

By John B. Powell in the “Editor and Publisher” and “The Fourth Estate” for August 18th, 1928.

“Not in power, nor in profit, but in the glory of the achievement.”

On the eve of his 86th birthday anniversary, with 60 years of newspaper work to his credit, I found John Devoy, soldier of the French Foreign Legion, Fenian chief and veteran editor of “The Gaelic American,” of No. 165 William Street, New York City, busily engaged at his weekly stunt of turning out three or four columns of editorials for his paper. Almost blind following a series of operations on his eyes, the fighting editor is pluckily holding time at bay while he rushes to completion his history of the Irish revolutionary movement which culminated in the Dublin “Rising” of 1916 and heralded the dawn of the Irish Free State.

Lincolnesque in feature and temperament, John Devoy, known to thousands of devoted followers throughout the world as the “Old Man,” is best loved or hated, as the case may be, for his virile championship of Irish freedom and American isolation.

Few now remember that Devoy abandoned a promising career in New York daily journalism to devote all his time to the championship of what was then regarded as a lost cause. The veteran editor before he finally launched himself on the turbulent stream of international politics [w]as editor of the “Irish Nation” which, after a checkered career, gave place to the “Gaelic American.” This became the mouthpiece of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood.

The “Gaelic American” was and is no tame affair. Through its column Devoy has

conducted many memorable battles, making hosts of bitter enemies and hosts of staunch friends. In 1898 he championed the cause of the Boers and helped to recruit the Irish Brigade which saw distinguished service on the African veldt before the two republics passed into the limbo of things that were.

Believing that the future of democracy throughout the world depends upon the leadership and strength of the United States, he took an early stand against all arbitration treaties viewing them as cloaks for entangling alliances, and played a prominent part in the defeat of several arbitration treaties with Great Britain.

As testimony to the weight attached to his views on international questions, the names of many world-famous statesmen are to be found on the subscription lists of the "Gaelic American," and it goes to all foreign offices in Europe.

His latest subscriber is Premier Mussolini of Italy.

Devoy's life from the day he set sail from Ireland bound for Algeria to join the Foreign Legion and learn "the soldier's glorious trade," has been choked with adventure. Returning from Africa, the Fenians gave him the job of organising the Irish in the British Army. According to the late William O'Brien, one of the constitutional leaders in the House of Commons, Devoy was the greatest organiser that Ireland ever produced. Anyway, the British soon found their army of occupation honeycombed with revolutionaries, and in 1866 they arrested him and sentenced him to 15 year's penal servitude.

After serving five years in convict prisons in England he was given his freedom and banished.

Arriving in New York in 1871, Devoy became attached to the "New York Herald" and later to Albert Pulitzer's "Journal" under the managing editorship of the late J. I. C. Clarke and soon won a reputation as a conscientious and efficient reporter. Earlier he had worked on the "Herald," then at the zenith of its power, as reporter, copy reader, and, finally, as chief of the foreign desk. Part of a foreign editor's job in those days Devoy recalled was to translate the French cables from Paris.

When James Gordon Bennett (the younger) sponsored Charles Stewart Parnell's tour of the United States, Devoy was assigned to cover the story and it was about this time that the editor enunciated his famous "New Departure," a declaration of tenant rights that led to the Land War in Ireland and abolished landlordism.

From Tom Connery, of the "Herald," Devoy got leave of absence and returned secretly to Ireland, met the Fenian leaders, won most of them to the new strategy and induced them to give tacit support to the leadership of Parnell. He already had swung the physical force group in the United States behind the great Irish American statesman – Ireland's "Uncrowned King."

Among other spectacular events in Devoy's career while he worked on newspapers here was the rescue of the Fenian soldiers he had "sworn in" and had been sent to the penal colony in Australia. With the assistance John Boyle O'Reilly, post editor of the "Boston Pilot," who had escaped from the Colony, he enlisted the aid of two

Americans – Capt. George B. Anthony of New Bedford and Henry C. Hathaway – who went to Australia in the “Catalpa” and after John J. Breslin had effected the escape of the prisoners brought them in triumph to New York.

Devoy also was instrumental in having Fenian funds placed at the disposal of John P. Holland, submarine inventor to build the “Fenian Ram,” the first successful submarine.

Devoy was working on the “Chicago Herald” at the time of the Dr. Cronin murder case, then regarded by newspapermen as the “Crime of the Century.” As a friend of the slain Fenian, Devoy exploded all of the false clues sent out to throw justice off the trail of the killers, who had the protection of a powerful element in the police force, and he eventually saw the assassins brought to book.

At this time he met Melville Stone, who was later to become chief of the “Associated Press.” Although their paths lay far apart and Devoy often took sharp “issue” with the great newspaper man, they remained warm friends. At that time Stone then editor of the “Chicago Daily News,” tried to induce Devoy to write the story of the Clan-na-Geal, an offer he felt forced to decline.

Devoy recalls that while working on the daily press he was often twitted in a good-natured way by his comrades as a “dynamiter.” The truth is the editor was opposed to all outrages. He was of the “warrior school” and believed with Lionel Johnson that before freedom came to Ireland:

“Some weapon on some field must gleam,
Some burning glory fire the Gael.”

When the Revolution broke out in Dublin in 1916, John Devoy hailed it as a justification of all his preachments, and, steeling himself to the shock as friends, old and young, fell before firing squads, rallied others to their cause.

Here is an incident that will be of interest to many New York City editors to-day:-

Knowing that Easter Sunday had been set for the Rising and finding the extras barren of all news from Ireland, he typed several notes saying “Ireland is in revolt.” He mailed them to the papers, but of them all the “New York Journal” seems to have been the only one that acted on the “tip.” In the early editions on Monday morning it ran a story indicating there was trouble in Ireland, and before evening the censorship was lifted and America was getting full details of the epochal battles raging in the heart of Dublin.

While Ireland was at grips with the Black and Tans, Devoy became engaged in a bitter controversy with Eamon de Valera, Provisional President of the Irish Republic, whom he accused of hauling down the republican flag. At the same time he was fighting shoulder to shoulder with Senators Borah, Reed and Moses and the other “Irreconcilables” against United States participation in the League of Nations.

It was the stormiest and most trying period of his career and held him to his desk for 14 and 15 hours a day.

Then the sun broke through. After all the strife, calm. His beloved tri-colour was flying free in the Irish breeze, the invaders had packed up and gone. And so, in 1924, the “Old Man” packed up too, and boarded the “President Harding” for a trip to the land from which he had been so long an exile.

The Yankee skipper ran up the Irish colours as a tribute to the old Rebel, and, happy under the two emblems he loves, Old Glory and the White, Green and Orange he sailed for Erin.

The Irish Free State had made great preparations for a state welcome but he waved all ceremony aside.

The Kildare Observer August 9 1924

**MR. JOHN DEVOY VISITS NAAS
MEETS HIS FORMER SWEETHEART
WHOM HE MOURNED AS DEAD**

Mr John Devoy, the veteran Fenian, visited Naas on Sunday last, accompanied by his niece, Miss Devoy, and his three nephews, Messrs Devoy, of Dublin; Mr. Henry Conyngham, of New York, and Mr Garrett Lombard, of Gorey (who is married to a relative of Mr. Devoy's). He first visited Greenhills, Kill, his native place, and was able to point out to his friends the exact spot where his home stood. It is quite close to Mr. Matthew Timmins' house at Greenhills, but no vestige of it now remains.

The first of his old friends whom Mr. Devoy visited in Naas was Mrs. Kilmurry, of South Main St., to whom in his early days he was engaged to be married, when she was Miss Elizabeth Kenny, of Tipper. John Devoy was at that time a clerk in the “Cork Office,” Naas, in the employment of Watkins' brewery, in whose employment were also his father and brothers. His association with the Fenian brotherhood necessitated his departure from Naas and from Ireland, and put an end to the romance of his early days. He, however, remained true to his first love, and never married. Mrs. Kilmurry warmly welcomed her friend of girlhood days, and entertained him and his friends to lunch. Although very deaf and suffering from defective sight, Mr. Devoy displayed remarkable recollection of persons and places in the vicinity of Naas. He informed Miss Curley (Mrs. Kilmurry's niece) that he had a vivid recollection of his frequent visits to her father's house at Halverstown, when her father, Mr. Michael Curley, played the fiddle and her uncle, Mr. Bernard Curley, the pipes during their youthful festivities.

“It is 58 years since John left Naas,” remarked Mrs. Kilmurry. “He was for six months under cover, sometimes visiting our house, but seldom staying more than one

day at any one house. He was during that time engaged in swearing in soldiers in the Fenian organisation, when they arrested and imprisoned him.” Mrs. Kilmurry added that in some way or other, information reached John Devoy in America that she had died, and on Sunday he told her he had mourned her as dead for more than 20 years. “It was like a voice from the grave,” he told her, “when he learned that she still lived.” Having chatted over old times and early recollections, Mr. Devoy took his departure, promising to return and spend a whole day with his former sweetheart before returning to America.

The Kildare Observer 20 April 1929

THE LATE JOHN DEVOY Removal of Remains to Ireland

The remains of Mr. John Devoy, the veteran Fenian, will be conveyed by the S.S. *President Harding* from New York on June 5, and will be landed at Cobh.

A large number of Irish-Americans have already booked passages on the *President Harding* in order to attend the funeral in Dublin on June 16.

The interment will take place in the Patriots’ Plot in Glasnevin, and the remains will lie near those of his colleagues in the Fenian movement, O’Donovan Rossa and Terence Bellew McManus.

The arrangements are in the hands of an Irish committee. The funeral will be not only a tribute of respect to a great patriot, but a National demonstration in the fullest sense of the word.

His Last Visit

The S.S. *President Harding* is the ship on which Mr. Devoy made his last trip to and from Ireland in 1924. On the eve of his departure, speaking at a banquet in his honour at the Dolphin Hotel, Dublin, he made an earnest plea for the sinking of personal differences for the good of our common country, and in closing his address he said the next time he would come to Dublin he would be brought there in a coffin.

The Kildare Observer 18 May 1929

Coming Funeral of John Devoy

A preliminary meeting was held in the Mansion House, Dublin, on Tuesday night last, under the presidency of Dr. Mark Ryan, with a view to making arrangements for

according a national tribute to the remains of John Devoy, on the occasion of the interment in Glasnevin on June 16th next.

There was a representative attendance, and it was decided to issue invitations with a view to forming a national committee which should be as widely representative as possible. A sub-committee was appointed for the purpose, and Piaras Beaslai was elected hon. secretary, and Senator T. Farren and Mr. Michael Staines hon. treasurers.

The late Mr. John Devoy was born in Co. Kildare, and had associations with Naas in his fight for Irish Freedom.

The Irish Times 22 June 1929

The late Mr. John Devoy Public Funeral in Dublin

The funeral of Mr. John Devoy, the Fenian leader, who died in America, took place in Dublin on Sunday to Glasnevin Cemetery. The remains were removed from the City Hall, where they had lain in state since Friday, and were followed by a large procession along Dame street, College Green, Westmoreland street, Sackville street, Rutland square, Frederick street, Blessington street, Berkeley road, Phibsborough road, and Finglas road. A mounted party of the National Army, which had formed up in Dame street, with the officer Commanding the Dublin District, army bands, and a detachment of infantry, led the procession. Behind came a body of clergy, and between them and the chief mourners, with the American delegation, was the gun-carriage supporting the coffin. It was covered with the Irish Free State and the American flags, and had a guard of honour. The St. James's Band, the members of the National Committee, President Cosgrove and the other members of the Executive Council, Chief Justice Kennedy, the Speaker and members of the Dail, Colonel Brennan and other official representatives, and a general body of Army officers, headed by military members of the Defence Council, came next.

They were followed by representatives of universities, including Professor L. O'Brien, University College, Galway; the Dublin City Commissioners; the chairmen of various City Councils; and other representatives of public bodies; members of the old Dublin Brigade, preceded by the St. Laurence O'Toole Pipers' Band; old Volunteers and members of kindred organisations; organised associations, headed by the band of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union; members of the general public, and the Civic Guard Band, heading the Civic Guard contingent.

The streets along the route to the cemetery were lined with people, and the monuments in Sackville street were used by as many sight-seers as could find foothold upon them.

At the cemetery members of the old Irish Republican Army formed a square out-

side the Fenian plot, where the remains were to be buried. A firing party of the National Army was present, in charge of Commandant F. Saurin; and the officers' guard of honour took up a position. They were in charge of Chief Staff Officer Colonel McLoughlin.

The remains were received by the Rev. W. Lenihan, C.C., St. Paul's, Arran Quay, who officiated at the graveside; and an oration was delivered by the Rev. P. J. O'Donnell, pastor of St. James's Roman Catholic Church, Boston.

The firing party then fired three volleys over the grave, and a company of buglers of the National Army sounded the "Last Post."

Wreaths were subsequently placed on the grave. They were from Richard F. Dalton and Harry Cunningham executors; representatives of Clan na Gael, New York, "A loving tribute to John Devoy and a pledge of fealty to his principles;" the National Committee; the Misses Hennessy; the Friends of Irish Freedom, New York, with "deepest sympathy;" Oglai na hEireann; Joseph McGrath; Cumann na mBan; The Greatest of Fenians; Cork John Devoy Funeral Committee, and Ard Comhairle, Saorstát Éireann.