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Thomas Francis Bourke — (1840 - 1889)

Part 2*

by Michael O'Donnell

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The barbarity of the sentence (death for treason) imposed on Bourke at once aroused public anger. Even as he and the other prisoners were being escorted back to Kilmainham Jail, protests began. Along the route a great mass of people had gathered; there was stone-throwing on the quays. Three constables in the police van were struck, though not seriously injured. No attack was made on the military escort.⁵³

Within weeks, public opinion across in the United States began to be expressed. On 15 May, 1867, Secretary of State Seward wrote to his Minister in London.

"The sanguinary sentences of the court shock the public sense. Executions conforming to them would leave a painful impression in a country where traditional sympathy with the revolution in Ireland is increased by convictions of national injustice."⁵⁴

Seward was probably keeping an eye on the Irish vote. The private thoughts of the U.S. administration may have been expressed by Benjamin Moran on 18 May. He was secretary to the American ambassador in London, and that day he wrote in his diary: "We got a cipher telegram from Mr. Seward to interpose and prevent the execution of Burke and Doran. But neither is a United States citizen. Still they will not be hanged, although they deserve it."⁵⁵ Meanwhile, appeals for clemency continued to pour into Dublin and London.

As to Burke himself, we can gauge his feelings from a letter he wrote from Kilmainham on 4 May to a priest in Clonmel.

Dear Rev. Father:

I am perfectly calm and resigned, with my thoughts firmly centred with hope in the goodness and mercy of that Kind Redeemer, also in the mediation and intercession of His Blessed Mother. I have only one thought which causes me much sorrow, that my good and loving mother will break down under the weight of her affliction, and, oh, God I who loved her more than the life which animates the hand that writes, to be the cause of it. I wrote to her at the beginning of my trial a long and last farewell. I have not written since, it would break my heart to attempt it, but I would ask you to tell her I am happy and reconciled to the will of God, who has given me this opportunity of saving my immortal soul.⁵⁶

John Savage, never a reliable witness, wrote an account of Burke in Kilmainham, said to have been copied from one published by one of Burke's visitors. Burke was lying on a hammock, with a table beside him on which stood a crucifix, books and holy water. This account suggests that he was in feeble health; he had to raise himself by a cord attached to a lower end of his hammock.⁵⁷

This implies too that Burke had a cell to himself. However, a report of 20 May 1867 from the Governor of Kilmainham to the Chief Secretary's office noted that the prison was overcrowded. All 20 cells had three prisoners in each.⁵⁸

Mass was celebrated for the political prisoners on Sundays and Wednesdays by the chaplain, Fr. Kennedy; this was accompanied by religious instruction.⁵⁹ The Sisters of Mercy from Goldenbridge are said to have called on Burke on one of his last days in prison.⁶⁰

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In the week after the trial, the movement for reprieve was low-key. Some Irish MPs, led by Sir John Gray, the member for Kilkenny, began working for a reprieve for both Burke and Doran as early as 3 May. Then on 12 May Doran's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, with the Government still determined to make an example of Burke.

On 8 May at Westminster the Chief Secretary, Lord Naas, pointed out that the Chief Justice was bound to apply laws on high treason.⁶¹ A report on Burke compiled on 9 May had a note which read: "Let the law take its course except that part of the sentence which directs that the head be severed from the body and that the body be divided into four quarters".⁶² But the public was not aware of this; so from 13 May the demand for reprieve began to gather momentum.

At a meeting in the Mansion House, Dublin on 14 May a memorial to the Lord Lieutenant requesting a reprieve was drawn up. On 15 May Kilkenny Corporation drew up a petition, and the next day memorials were presented by Galway and Athy Town Commissioners. Other memorials came from the Society of Friends (Quakers) and Dungarvan Town Commissioners.⁶³ On 18 May U.S. Minister Adams received a telegram from Secretary of State Seward denouncing the sentences.

Still the government seemed determined to carry out the sentence, although the last such barbarous execution had been as far back as 1803, when Robert Emmet was publicly executed. The reform party in the Commons was pressing hard for a reprieve, and the English press agreed that the sentence should be commuted. Irish conservatives alone demanded the full measure of the law.

However Cardinal Cullen, writing on 10 May to Monsignor Kirby in Rome, expressed his strong opinion that the sentence would be commuted. Cullen had also given his support to the organisers of the Mansion House meeting.⁶⁴

The warrant authorising the execution of Burke was handed by the Clerk of the Crown to the head High Sheriff on the afternoon of Thursday 23 May. He arranged the execution for 6 a.m. on Wednesday 29 May. The Governor of Kilmainham, Henry Price, then set about his preparations. He wrote on 25 May to the Town Major suggesting "the propriety of placing 80 or 100 soldiers inside the Prison on Tuesday night", adding that a strong military force should also be stationed outside.⁶⁵

On Friday 24 May the Lord Lieutenant returned from London. He had hardly settled in Dublin when a deputation from the Corporation called. Although he listened with courtesy to their plea, he could hold out no hope for a reprieve.

In London U.S. Ambassador Adams, in an interview with Lord Stanley, the British Foreign Secretary, gave him his views of the American government. Adams's secretary Moran noted in his diary: "Burke is a murderer and deserves death and as he is an Irishman I see no reason why we should intercede for him. It's carrying American politics too far to become the champions of these Irish rascals because they have votes at home".⁶⁶

However, the movement for reprieve gathered momentum. On Saturday 25 May an influential deputation of from 40 to 50 MPs, including the famous economist John Stuart Mill, waited on the British Prime Minister at his London residence to make a final appeal for Burke. The Premier Lord Derby replied:

We have weighed the subject well. We have discussed it in Cabinet, in the presence of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and in the presence of the Chief Secretary of Ireland. We could find nothing that should keep Burke from suffering the extreme penalty of the law. Nothing could have prevented the effusion of blood on the occasion except the extreme cowardice of the party who fired a volley on the soldiers at 100 yards distance, and who when they saw the soldiers advance ran away, Burke being captured in a ditch when endeavouring to make his escape. The Government agree that if we were justified in sparing the life of this unhappy man, nothing would have given us greater satisfaction than to extend that clemency to him; but there would a very serious risk being though guilty of dereliction of duty if they failed to visit with the severest punishment, one who, induced a number of unhappy dupes in Ireland to join in that which might have led to serious consequences.⁶⁷



That Saturday afternoon (25 May) at about 2.30 pm, Cardinal Cullen with his vicar-general, Monsignor Forde, and his private secretary, Monsignor (afterwards Cardinal) Moran, called on the Lord Lieutenant. According to the Archbishop of New York Cullen, although a strong opponent of Fenianism, pleaded for clemency for Burke. After the meeting the Lord Lieutenant telegraphed to the Cabinet then meeting in London.⁶⁸

At this meeting, the government appears to have decided to reprieve Burke. What caused it to change its mind? The question cannot be answered with certainty, since Cabinet minutes were only taken from 1904. Was it the vast number of letters from individuals and memorials from public bodies? Did the visit by Ambassador Adams to the Foreign Secretary swing the decision? Or was it the Cardinal's plea that steered the Cabinet towards clemency? It may have been a combination of all those factors. However, the Cabinet decision had still to go to Queen Victoria in Balmoral for her assent.

At police headquarters in Dublin Castle that Sunday preparations were being made to execute Burke the following Wednesday. The Commissioner of Police, Colonel Henry Atwell Lake, noted that the ground before the jail would be kept by 190 constable, 10 sergeants and 6 inspectors. All would assemble at 4 a.m. under the command of a Divisional Superintendent; each constable would be armed with a sword and a loaded revolver.

The military would also be involved: an infantry company would be stationed inside the jail and a company of dragoons would take up positions on the left and right flanks outside. The garrisons in Islandbridge and Richmond Barracks were placed on alert.⁶⁹ The prison governor was planning for the disposal of Burke's body. A coffin was ordered from a Mr. Lawlor of Dublin, and permission was sought to have the body disposed of within the prison.⁷⁰

All through Sunday the public and the press waited for word of a reprieve. Irish MPs were preparing to journey north for an audience with Victoria if no directive for clemency came before Monday. Then just after midnight on Sunday the decision to save Burke came from Victoria by special courier.⁷¹

The news reached Dublin at 3 p.m. on Monday 27 May. At 4 p.m. mounted orderlies were despatched from the Viceregal Lodge to the Governor of Kilmainham, the Lord Major of Dublin and Cardinal Cullen. At Kilmainham the chaplain, Fr. Kennedy, had the duty of informing Burke that his death sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life. No account has survived of Burke's reaction. The governor acknowledged receipt of the news at 4.30.⁷² The reprieve was announced in the Commons at 5 p.m. by the Lord Chancellor of the Exchequer and in the Lords by the Premier.⁷³

In a long editorial on 11 June 1867, the *Freeman's Journal*, organ of the Home Rule Party and a stern opponent of Fenianism, stated:

There was no doubt as to the evidence, it only remained for the public opinion of the Empire to intervene between the prisoners and the scaffold. Never was that opinion so unanimous and one would suppose the friends of the prisoners would have been delighted at such a generous and universal manifestation of British and Irish humanity.

Not at all. They are highly indignant that the cause was not sanctified by the blood of martyrs. They were anxious to appear to be for the preservation of the lives of the prisoners but when they were preserved they are furious because they were not martyred. Fenianism, according to the *New York Herald*, has become a nuisance and a positive evil. The American government, which so long humoured the swindle, now thinks it high time to break with it.⁷⁴

Shortly after 5 a.m. on Tuesday 28 May Burke was removed from Kilmainham to Mountjoy prison. Here he was dressed in convict uniform, had his face clean-shaved and his hair cropped close. Because of his poor health, he was not put to hard labour; instead, he was placed under medical treatment.⁷⁵



Burke's stay in Mountjoy was short. Early in July 1867 he left Ireland for ever, arriving in Millbank prison on 4 July. This prison stood on the Thames near the Houses of Parliament. Built in the early 1800s as a model prison to reform criminals through solitude and constant work, it was famous for its tomb-like silence, the loneliness and bleakness of the cells and the grinding monotony of the prisoner's existence there.

A prisoner spent some nine months as a probationary in either Millbank or Pentonville. This was passed in solitary confinement, strict silence observed even when meeting other prisoners. The remainder of the time was spent alone in the cells on such things as bag-making, weaving or oakum-picking, with periods for reading and eating. Convicts were permitted to write one letter on reception at Millbank, but no more until the probation had ended.

The cells at Millbank, about nine feet long and eight feet wide, were furnished with a plank bed, a bucket fitted with a lid, a wooden platter and spoon, a pint tin and a chamber pot. The bucket both held water and did duty as a seat. For up to ten hours a day a prisoner was expected to sit on this performing his work, even in winter in a stone-floored cell so cold prisoners became numb. They were not allowed to pace the floor to warm themselves. Bedding was dirty and inadequate. Prisoners could bathe only once a fortnight, several having to share the same water.

Like bedding, the food was inadequate. The standard rations for convicts were: for breakfast, 8 ozs of bread and $\frac{3}{4}$ pint of cocoa; for dinner, on week days, 4 ozs of meat on four days, one pint of soup on one day, and 1lb of suet pudding on one other day. Sunday dinner comprised 12 ozs of bread, 4 ozs of cheese, and one pint of water; for supper, 6 ozs of bread and one pint of gruel.⁷⁶

On 27 February 1868, having completed his probation, Burke was transferred to Working Convict Prison in Surrey. This was considered to be a hospital prison for both the physically and mentally ill. For an unknown reason he was moved back to Millbank on 20 April 1868; he spent only two weeks there, returning to work.

In Woking Burke's diet consisted of bread and tea for breakfast. He was allowed 20 ozs of bread, $\frac{1}{4}$ ozs of tea, 4 ozs of milk and $1\frac{1}{2}$ ozs of sugar daily. His dinner was soup, potatoes (8 ozs) and bread. Prisoners were permitted 10 ozs of meat each day, but appear not to have always got it; it may have been used to make the soup. The supper was bread and tea.

Each prisoner on punishment was granted a daily concession of 8 ozs of bread, $\frac{1}{4}$ ozs of tea, $1\frac{1}{2}$ ozs of sugar and 4 ozs of milk.⁷⁷

After the public outcry which followed the exposure of the treatment of O'Donovan Rossa while in prison, the MP for Cork county secured the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry into prison conditions. Headed by the Earl of Devon, this met in the summer of 1870. Burke was one of those granted an interview. He wrote also at length to the Commission on the sufferings of his deranged friend and fellow-Fenian in Woking, Ricard O'S. Burke - no relation.

He had been only three times to exercise ... I believe, the only times he has been out of bed since 23 July. I am also told ... that for the past thirteen days he has taken little or not food. This treatment is well calculated, if not intended, to provoke him to some desperate act of violence ... from my experience of the officials of this prison I feel confident they would be but too anxious to avail themselves of any colourable pretext to lay violent hands upon my poor friend, by laying open his head with their staffs, or cutting him down with their sabres; for the criminal imbeciles, confined in this prison, have not an immunity from this inhuman and brutal treatment; and from the course adopted by the officials of this prison towards my fellow prisoners within twenty-four hours after they had submitted their evidence to the Commissioners, that the submitting of evidence ... by any prisoner should not prejudice the future treatment of that prisoner while in prison ... I have every reason to believe that my poor friend will be subjected to ... all the worst effects of penal discipline, and the treatment which has already deprived him of reason will be persistently and steadily followed up until it deprives him of life.⁷⁸



Burke's own prison career was coming to an end. As The Tipperary Fenian Denis Dowling Mulcahy wrote his father:

Between half-past twelve and one o'clock, Thursday, the 22nd December 1870, the Governor, Captain Bramly, communicated to me, Dr. Power, Colonel Burke, and Mr. Dillon, that he had instructions to ask us if we would accept our release on condition of leaving the country, never again to return to it, or the alternative of remaining in penal servitude to finish our sentences.⁷⁹

How did it come about that Fenian prisoners were being released after serving only three-and-a-half years of their sentences? Following their harsh sentences and the accounts of English prison conditions, public opinion in Ireland veered from indifference to Fenianism to being sympathetic to the "Irish State Prisoners". The treatment of the Fenians as if they were wild beasts captured the sympathy of many people.

A movement for the release of all Fenian prisoners took final shape in the Amnesty Association founded in Dublin on 28 June 1869. Isaac Butt, its president, who had defended Burke two years previously, laboured unceasingly to obtain the Fenians' release. Meetings were held all over the country; many were compared with the Repeal gatherings of Daniel O'Connell.

Under Butt all shades of nationalist opinion were drawn together, even the Fenian organisation supporting the agitation. One monster meeting held in Tipperary town on Sunday, 24 October 1869 was alleged to have attracted 20,000 people.⁸⁰

The agitation was taken to the electorate when a vacancy occurred in Tipperary in November 1869. O'Donovan Rossa's name was put forward; despite all opposition, he won. Although the result was declared void, it showed English public opinion that Ireland was determined to have all prisoners released. (In New York on 24 July 1872 Burke chaired a meeting to collect funds to defray the expenses of this and the subsequent election.)⁸¹

The amnesty drive was ultimately successful. Between December 1870 and January 1871 groups of Fenians were released. Burke and eight other prisoners were moved from Portland and Woking to Millbank.⁸² From there they were taken by train to Liverpool on 13 January 1871. A week earlier another batch of Fenian prisoners had passed through Liverpool on their way to America.⁸³

The British Government paid Burke's passage to America and supplied him with clothes suitable for winter travel and £5 in pocket money. The outfit and the pocket money totalled in value £35. 3s. Od.⁸⁴

From Millbank Burke wrote on 9 January 1871 a letter to Kickham at Mullinahone.

My Dear Friend Kickham: Will you give me the pleasure of "gripping your fist" before I take my last look of the old land? As we understand the arrangement, we are to call at Cove on Sunday *en route* for New York. I hope you will find it convenient to grant me this favour, as I am most unwilling to leave, without seeing you. I regret, for many reasons, the stringency of the conditions which will not permit me to spend a day or two in "the valley near Slievenamon". Well, never mind. You promised that you would "put in a good word" for me; but I suppose you may now consider released from this obligation. I expect you will have your *carte* for me. Don't disappoint me.⁸⁵

At Lime Street station in Liverpool, where the train arrived at 3.40 on Saturday morning, the only people awaiting the prisoners were the mother and a young brother of Peter Maughan, and a correspondent for *The Irishman*. The arrival had been kept secret to avoid a demonstration. The prisoners were taken from the rear carriage of the train, had a few quick words with friends and were bundled into a bus which took them to the landing stage.

From there they were taken by the tender *Satellite* to the Cunard mail steamer *Russia*, in which they were to sail to America. All the prisoners were described as looking well, in excellent spirits and enjoying their freedom. Aboard the *Russia*, said to have been the most superbly fitted vessel in the Cunard fleet, the prisoners were given saloon berths.



The vessel sailed for Cobh at 2.30 on Saturday afternoon, where it arrived at 1 p.m. on Sunday to be met by relatives and friends who went out to the *Russia*.⁸⁶ The Cunard offices in Cobh had been besieged from an early hour by well-wishers wishing to board the passenger ship. The Government, however, opposed a demonstration, so a limit was placed on the number of people allowed to board the tender. The prisoners did however, get the opportunity to meet their families.

At Cobh, each prisoner was presented with £10, a rug and a warm Ulster overcoat by an amnesty group from Cork. The Cork committee paid the passages of Mrs. Roantree and Mrs. Brown who accompanied their husbands into exile. Money and clothing also came from the Dublin Amnesty Association. At 3 p.m. a flotilla of boats came alongside the *Russia*, filled with bands and cheering crowds.

Charles Kickham was not among those who went on board the *Russia*. It seems that no one from Tipperary saw Burke leave Ireland for the last time. A Dublin man named Brady presented him with four years' bound files of *The Irishman*, containing the reports of the trials and the efforts to gain their release. The *Russia* sailed at 6 p.m. on Sunday evening, 15 January 1871 from Cork harbour.⁸⁷

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Twelve days later, on Friday 27 January 1871, The *Russia* docked at Jersey City, where an immense and enthusiastic crowd awaited. Hardly had the vessel anchored when the Tammany Hall committee and the Wolfe Tone circle of the Fenian Brotherhood came on board to welcome the exiles. An address to Burke read in part: "On the hill sides of Tipperary, leading on the gallant and true men who rushed to strike for Ireland's independence, you displayed those soldierly abilities which the experience of many a hard-fought field had taught you". In his reply Burke played down the references to his abilities on the hill sides of Tipperary. "Your address over-rates my abilities, but in its sincerity recognises that the motives were pure, which drove myself those with me, to stake all in the cause of beloved Ireland."⁸⁸

On the quay were John O'Mahony, O'Donovan Rossa and numerous Irish-American Fenians. There too were Burke's mother and sister, Tammany Hall providing a carriage to bring them to Sweeny's Hotel where Burke was to rest for some days. But the hotel was besieged over the weekend by well-wishers and the police had to be called to keep order.

By Monday delegates from Fenian centres and other Irish societies were arriving to congratulate the freed prisoners. In responding Burke seems to have acted as spokesman for the group. A figure from his past took a part in the congratulations; General Benjamin F. Butler, the former invader and ruthless governor of New Orleans in April 1862 may have been instrumental in seeing Burke into the Confederacy. On Monday 30 January 1871 he introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives:

That the Congress of the United States, in the name and on the behalf of the people of the United States, give to J. O'Donovan Rossa, Thomas Clarke Luby, John O'Leary, Thomas F. Burke, Charles Underwood O'Connell, and their associates, Irish exiles and patriots, a cordial welcome to the capital, also to the country, and that a copy of this resolution be transmitted to them by the President of the United States.

This resolution was passed by 172 votes to 21 in a thin house. It is likely that, rather than being a vote of support for Irish revolutionaries, this was an act of hostility against Britain because of her stance in the recent Civil War.⁸⁹

New York City Hall now decided to hold a parade on 9 February. A meeting between aldermen and the exiles was held the week after their arrival; here the first clash occurred between O'Donovan Rossa and W.M. "Boss" Tweed, who ruled Tammany Hall and the city council. This, and the fact that at the end of 1871 Rossa ran on the Republican ticket against Tweed for the New York senate, were to have unfavourable consequences for Burke.



Burke in a long speech poured what oil he could on the turbulent waters that flowed between Tweed and Rossa, and the exiles agreed to participate in a procession masterminded by Tammany Hall which was to meander around Brooklyn. Of this Devoy later wrote:

A little later there was a big parade in our honour and we were greeted by committees from every city in the East and from Chicago, who presented us with addresses of welcome and some of them with money to enable us to make a new start in life. Tammany Hall (then controlled by "Boss" Tweed, who was fighting for his political life) collected 22,000 dollars for us, but about half of it went on the parade and Sweeny's hotel bill for the six weeks we were there was 6,000 dollars. But we got the rest of it.⁹⁰

Six weeks in Sweeny's hotel greatly improved the appearance and physique of the former prisoners. Also, a special edition of Burke's dock speech was printed in Philadelphia and presented to him.⁹¹

On a Sunday night near the end of January 1871 Burke broke from routine of receptions to give a charity lecture in aid of the poor of the 19th ward. Held in a large basement of a Dominican church, this was his first-ever lecture, one of many he gave in 1871.⁹²

Burke had discovered his vocation. He was to prove a commanding public speaker with an excellent presence, and to show great ability as an organiser. "He and Thomas Clarke Luby went together on a lecturing tour which extended as far west as Nevada; their meetings were very successful and did much to revive the Fenian spirit."⁹³

By now Burke had taken to spelling his name as "Bourke"; possibly he saw this form as more Irish and patriotic. He began also to use the military title "General". From soon after his landing in the U.S. he referred to himself, (and the title was applied to him) as General Thomas Francis Bourke. In Ireland he had used the title "Colonel" and was on occasion called "Captain". All these titles were granted by the Fenian Brotherhood, or self-proclaimed; Burke never earned them either on a battlefield or in a military college.

During February 1871, lectures and processions continued for Burke and his companions. On 13 February they visited the home of the Fenian John M'Clure's father in upstate New York, where Burke spoke for the party. On 16 February, the Mayor and aldermen of New York laid on a banquet which 200 attended. Here Burke spoke of suffering "such indignities as no country but barbarous England would inflict on her prisoners."

For him, Ireland was a nation struggling for republican institutions. This party last until 2 a.m., ending with Burke singing, "The Harp that once through Tara's halls". He was in Boston on 21 February; in a lecture in the Music Hall, he saw lack of united action as the bane of revolutionary movements in Ireland.⁹⁴

Money also flowed in for the new-arrived Fenians. The Irish American citizens of Boston, on 16 February just before Burke lectured there, collected 1,475 dollars which they gave to Burke and the others.⁹⁵ Like the Tammany Hall contribution, this was only one of several sums subscribed to the exiles.

On 17 February, a delegation from the Mayor's office in Washington, D.C., invited the Fenians to sample the hospitality of the approaching carnival. Burke and his companions arrived on 20 February, taking rooms at Ebbit House where they were received by the Irish citizens.⁹⁶

The party consisted of Burke, Charles U. O'Connell, Henry S. Mulleda, Patrick Walsh, George Brown, Edward Power, John M'Clure, Peter Maughan, John Devoy, William F. Roantree, "Pagan" O'Leary, Patrick Lennon and E.P. St. Clair. Until the weekend they were entertained by the local Irish-American community.⁹⁷ They also met the President. Devoy later wrote:

We were invited to Washington and were guests of the city for a week. During our stay President Grant expressed a wish to see us and he received us on the steps of the White House. Bourke was introduced by the chairman of the Reception Committee, and the rest of us by Bourke. He was quite self-possessed and



at his ease, while the President seemed a little embarrassed. The great soldier was a man of few words, but was very partial to the Irish. He appointed Tom Murphy Collector of the Port; Pat Jones Postmaster; and Jack Gleason, Collector of Internal Revenue for the Eastern District of New York - the best offices he had in his gift in New York.

As Bourke introduced each of us, he made a little speech and as Grant shook hands with us he merely said: 'Glad to see you'. The motion of his arm was like a pump handle.⁹⁸

A modern historian has placed those heady events in context.

If the exiles were not already aware of the extent to which American Fenianism was enmeshed in the jungle of American politics they soon were as both the Republican and Democratic political 'machines' sought to use their arrival to their respective advantages. The triumphal progress of the exiles which had begun with a tumultuous welcome in New York was to come to a climax with a meeting on the White House steps on 22 February 1871. President Ulysses S. Grant could not afford to ignore the Irish votes either.⁹⁹

Burke spent the spring and summer of 1871 travelling, lecturing and re-organising nationalist groups in the U.S., especially for the new Irish Confederation, formed in March 1871 by the Fenians released in December 1870 and January 1871. Its first directory included Burke, Devoy, O'Donovan Rossa, Thomas Clarke Luby and Edmund Power.¹⁰⁰ The new body hoped to end the divisions in Irish nationalist circles.

However, the Confederation was never popular, being seen by many as formed solely to promote the interests of its founders. During March and April 1871 Burke toured extensively in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut and upstate New York organising clubs for the Confederation. Everywhere he was met by bands and warmly welcomed by Irish-American community.

In a letter to John Mitchel, Rossa described the New Confederation.

Many of our correspondents ask us what pledge or oath is required. There is no oath, no pledge required other than what his subscription pledges to a man. Yet any men forming a club may pledge themselves to do all they can do as American citizens to aid their brothers in Ireland in a struggle for liberty. The Irish Confederation is a public organisation. It will impose no oath or no obligation that would repel any one disposed to give a mite to the cause of Ireland.¹⁰¹

Into the early months of 1872, Burke continued his lecture tours for the Confederation. In May 1871 with O'Donovan Rossa he was in Springfield, Illinois, where the state governor presided; then on to St. Louis, Missouri.¹⁰² In June and July he progressed through Omaha and Sacramento to San Francisco, where there was a strong Fenian following with a Thomas F. Burke circle.¹⁰³

However, while the Confederation made progress, few Fenians joined it. Most of its strength came from men who had taken no part in earlier Irish-American organisations. Still Burke continued to work for it to the end of 1872. The first annual convention was held in May 1872, when a directory of twelve members, including Burke, was created.

The future of American Fenianism was not to lie with the Confederation, but with a secret organisation which had been founded in New York on 20 June 1867 by J.J. Collins. This was *Clan-na-Gael*. Modelled on the Masonic Society, each member had to take a solemn oath to take up arms to establish an Irish Republic. The new republic was to have complete political independence and a guarantee of full civil and religious liberty to all.

By the spring of 1873 "the Irish Confederation had collapsed; the Fenian Brotherhood remained moribund; the future was to belong to Clan na Gael."¹⁰⁴ *The Boston Pilot* summed up the situation. "At present, the two most prominent organisations, but not the most powerful, are the Irish Confederation and the Fenian Brotherhood. The first has everything that is meant by honesty of purpose, and would become a power if there was anything but apathy in the breasts of Irishmen throughout the land. The Fenian Brotherhood has returned to John O'Mahony for a leader and is rattling its old bones a good deal and hopes for rejuvenation under the old man's banner"¹⁰⁵



Around 1877 Clan Na Gael concluded a formal alliance with the Irish Republican Brotherhood in the home country and shaped itself into an organisation more disciplined and secretive than the (U.S.) Fenian Brotherhood. Burke had around 1874 switched his allegiance to Clan-na-Gael: so had Rossa, Devoy and other leading Irish-Americans.¹⁰⁶

From then on Burke was in the front rank of the Clan, helping by his position and influence to model and direct the policy of the body. He attended several conventions, including that of 1874 in Baltimore, where he was instrumental in having Devoy elected chairman, and he was a member of the reception committee for Parnell and John Dillon.¹⁰⁷

While in the Clan he was co-opted to the famous **Skirmishing Fund** and put his name to a letter calling for action and the creation of a "Special National Fund". This appeared in the *Irish World* of 21 April 1877. However, it seems unlikely that he subscribed totally to the ideals of the Skirmishing Fund, which was to bring a campaign of terrorism to England by dynamiting bridges, gas works and arsenals.¹⁰⁸

Burke attended the convention of the Fenian Brotherhood in New York on 27 January 1876. Here John O'Mahony was elected Head Centre and Burke a member of the new council.¹⁰⁹ The Brotherhood continued to function until 1886, when it was disbanded as a result of the November 1885 convention.¹¹⁰

Burke had of course, also to earn a livelihood. In 1872 he ran for the office of Sheriff in Brooklyn, but was defeated because of his support for O'Donovan Rossa in the latter's campaign against "Boss" Tweed and Tammany Hall.¹¹⁵ Soon after Burke was appointed a deputy Sheriff; later he obtained the position of Clerk of Supply and Repairs in the Department of Public Works in New York, a post he held until his death.¹¹¹

In November 1872, Rossa expressed the hope that Burke might be elected to Congress; but Burke failed to obtain nomination, as Tammany Hall had not forgiven him. He ran for the Commission-ership of Charities in November 1872; again he got nowhere.¹¹²

Despite his popularity as an Irish National symbol, Burke could not break into American politics. This was because of his independent outlook and his unwillingness to be a part of the local political machine.

Little of Burke's private life in America 1871, has been recorded. However, in January 1872 O'Donovan Rossa gave an account of Burke's New Year's day celebrations.

At eleven o'clock a carriage called at my door, and in walked General Bourke and his brother Edward. Our Kilkenny housekeeper had to do the honours of the table in the absence of Mrs. O'D., who was 'confined' to the care of a little visitor of her own she had brought us a few days before. The company insisted on my going out with them, and Tom Bourke having kissed the baby away we went.

Orders were given to the coachman to drive up town and pull up at Mike Ryan's, corner of Third street and Bowery. We met there a sister of Captain John M'Clure's, Mrs. Ryan, her sister, Miss Hannon, whom Bourke felt disposed to be very soft with (indeed I may say he did not feel indisposed to be very very soft with all the girls) - her mother, Mrs Hannon, a sister of Collector Murphy's.

Wine again and music with it, for Miss Hannon, who is a splendid pianist, and a splendid girl in every way, could not get Bourke out of the house, and we made our way to Mr Luby's, 311 Forty first street.¹¹³

Burke, who never married, died at his home at 209 East Thirtysixth street in New York city on Sunday, 10 November 1889 from an acute inflammation of the kidneys after an illness of only ten days. The funeral took place the following Wednesday. His remains, carried on the shoulders of six members of the IRB, were taken to St. Gabriel's church, where Fr. E.J. Kennedy, assisted by Frs. Keefe and McKernan, chanted the Requiem Mass. From there the funeral procession proceeded to Long Island ferry house.¹¹⁴

John Devoy wrote: "I was away from New York and in financial straits when Bourke died on



November 10, 1889, and did not know of his death until my return. He was buried in Calvary Cemetery, not far from where Michael Doheny lies. Ireland lost one of her finest sons by the death of Thomas Francis Bourke; no truer Irishman ever lived."¹¹⁵

Ballyhurst apart, Burke had acquitted himself well. At his trial, and while awaiting death in Dublin, he showed a steady acceptance of his fate. He lived through the rigours of prison life with his sanity intact, and displayed a high sense of moral courage in speaking for his colleagues.

For an assessment of Burke one many rely on Gustave Cluseret, who, despite his attacks on the Fenian Movement, commented: " I have known Stephens, Bourke, Kelly and many others, gallant men who have made sacrifices for the cause of their country and liberty, unhappily unheard of in this age of selfishness and mean ambitions. Some of them like Bourke are of the true Roman mould, and will be transmitted to posterity, as the ideal of self-abnegation and sacrifice."¹¹⁷



The monument erected at Ballyhurst in 1967 by the Old IRA to the memory of the Fenians who rose there in 1867.

FOOTNOTES

53. Larcom Papers, official Correspondence, N.L.I. MS. 7594.
54. *D'Arcy*, 255.
55. Moran Diary quoted in *D'Arcy*, 255.
56. *Recollections*, 361.
57. *Savage*, 159/60.
58. C.S.O. Reg. Papers, 1867/1737.
59. Annual Report of the Directors of Convict Prisons in Ireland for the year ended 31 December 1867. (Dublin, 1868), 18.
60. *Savage*, 161.
61. *Daily News*, 8 May 1867.
62. Convict Papers, B21, 1867, S.P.O., Dublin Castle.
63. *Ibid.*
64. P.J. Corish, 'Cardinal Cullen and the National Association of Ireland', *Reportorium Novum*, iii (1962), 47 / 48; *Freeman's Journal*, 15 May 1867.
65. C.S.O. Reg. Papers, 1867/9420, 1867/9290.
66. *D'Arcy*, 256, n.72.
67. *Freeman's Journal*, 27 May 1867
68. P. MacSuibhne, *Paul Cullen and his Contemporaries*, (Naas, 1965), iii, 423 / 24, 419 / 20; hereafter *MacSuibhne*.



69. C.S.O. Reg. Papers, 1867/930; *O Broin*, 175/76.
70. C.S.O. Reg. papers, 1867/9394.
71. MacSuibhne, 424; *Freeman's Journal*, 27 May 1867.
72. MacSuibhne, 424/26; *Convict Papers*, B21, 1867, S.P.O.
73. MacSuibhne, 424/26.
74. *Ibid.*, 426/28.
75. *Irishman*, 1 June 1867.
76. T.W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution, 1846-82*, (Oxford, 1982), 145.49.
77. H.C. 1871, xxxii, 56.
78. *Ibid.*
79. *Irishman* 31 December 1870.
80. Marnane, 82.
81. *Irishman*, 17 August 1872.
82. William Francis Roantree, Denis Dowling Mulcahy, Edmund Power, Edward Pilsworth St. Clair, Patrick Lennon, Patrick Walsh, Peter Maughan, and George Brown.
83. *Irishman*, 21 January 1871.
84. H.C. 1871 (144), lviii, 461/62.
85. *Irishman*, 14 January 1871.
86. *Irishman*, 21 January 1871.
87. *Irishman*, 21 January 1871.
88. *Irishman*, 18 February. 1871.
89. *Irishman*, 18 February 1871. 4 March 1871.
90. *Recollections*, 361.
91. *Irishman*, 4 March 1871.
92. *Irishman*, 18 March 1871.
93. *Recollections*, 362.
94. *Irishman*, 15 April 1871.
95. *Irishman*, 11 March 1871.
96. *Ibid.*
97. *Ibid.*
98. *Recollections*, 362.
99. K.R.M. Short, *The Dynamite War: The Irish-American Bombers in Victorian Britain* (Dublin, 1979), 25/26; hereafter *Short*.
100. *D'Arcy*, 372/73; Henri Le Caron: *Twenty-five years in the Secret Service*, (Wakefield, 1974), 104. hereafter *le Caron*.
101. *Irishman*, 29 April 1871.
102. *Irishman*, 10 June 1871.
103. *Irishman*, 16 September 1871; R.A. Burchell, *The San Francisco Irish, 1848 -1880*, (Manchester, 1979), 99.
104. *Short*, 27/28.
105. *D'Arcy*, 285.
106. *Le Caron*, 120.
107. *Recollections*, 355/56, 362.
108. *D'Arcy*, 392.
109. *D'Arcy*, 406/08.
110. *Post Bag*, i, 27/28.
111. *Recollections*, 362.'
112. *Irishman*, 23 November, 1872.
113. *Irishman*, 3 February 1872/
114. *Irish American*, 23 November 1889.
115. *Recollections*, 362.
117. *Irishman*, 25 January 1868.

