

# Denis Dowling Mulcahy: The Artful Dollier

*Bernardine Ruddy*

*Denis Dowling Mulcahy (1837-1900), one of the early members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, had a contemporary importance, though to-day he is a largely forgotten figure. From Redmondstown near Clonmel, he was a lifelong friend of John O'Leary and Thomas Clarke Luby and a reader and sub-editor with the Irish People. When the newspaper was suppressed in September 1865 he was arrested, tried and sentenced to ten years penal servitude. Released in 1871 under the terms of the Fenian Amnesty, he spent the rest of his life in America.*

## **Family Background**

In 1820 the Mansion House, Offices and Demesne of Redmondstown was advertised for letting.<sup>1</sup> The new tenant was Denis Mulcahy of Marlfield<sup>2</sup> who married Margaret O'Brien, daughter of Daniel O'Brien of Clonmel three years later.<sup>3</sup> In 1824 Denis Mulcahy acquired more land, this time in the townlands of Shanbally and Ballysheehan near Burncourt, on the estate of Viscount Lismore of Shanbally Castle. In the estate rent ledger there are references dated 1829 and 1832 to a house which he built in Shanbally.<sup>4</sup> That he was prosperous is shown by his inclusion in 1834 as one of the highest rate payers in the barony of Iffa and Offa West at the Special Sessions held under the Road Act.<sup>5</sup>

He maintained both Redmondstown and Shanbally (which are a distance of approximately twenty miles apart) for a period of twenty years, his tenancy of Shanbally ceasing in the mid-1840s. In September 1844, in evidence before the Devon Commission, he gave his residence as Redmondstown, saying he held 250 acres, holding by lease, (this was probably the combined total). Denis Mulcahy's evidence is of particular interest in helping to understand the radicalism which his son, Denis Dowling Mulcahy, was later to display. While for years he had kept forty or fifty men he felt that the plight of the labouring class was deteriorating. He believed that if farmers were allowed to give labourers an allotment of at least one acre it would greatly improve their living conditions while benefiting the farmer. Wages in that part of the county were always paid in cash. He himself paid from £400 to £500 a year.<sup>6</sup>

It was against this comfortable, strong farming background that Denis Dowling Mulcahy was born in 1837; however, the family in Redmondstown was an unconventional one. His baptism is recorded in the local church in Powerstown on 29 April 1837 as the son of Denis Mulcahy and Ellen Downing.<sup>7</sup> The register also records the baptism of two older siblings, Catherine (1830) and Mary Anne (1835). All three children were illegitimate. The records reveal that Denis Mulcahy and Ellen Downing were married on 29 April 1837 on the same day their son Denis was baptised. The year after, the couple had another child, a daughter

called Ellen. That they spent part of their time in Shanbally is evidenced by the record in the Clogheen register in 1834 of the baptism of a son called John, though in this register there is no reference to the marital status of the parents.<sup>8</sup>

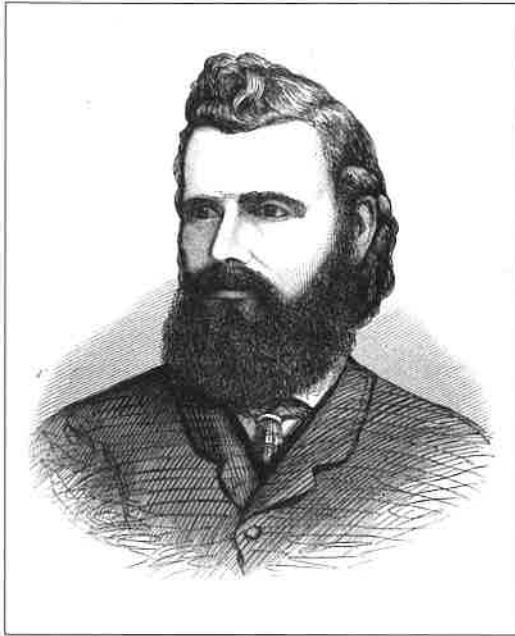
What happened to Margaret O'Brien, the woman Denis Mulcahy married in 1823, and whether there was any issue of the marriage, is unknown. It would seem that from at least the late 1820s the relationship of Denis Mulcahy and Ellen Downing was that of husband and common law wife: in view of their ongoing relationship and the birth of children, it is reasonable to presume that up to this time that Margaret O'Brien was still living, thus preventing the legalisation of the second union. This first marriage may have broken down irretrievably due to complete incompatibility or a serious medical condition; whatever the reason, Denis Mulcahy and Ellen Downing lived openly together. While two variants of Ellen's surname, Downey and Downing, appear in the records, it is the form Dowling her son Denis always used. His attachment to his mother is indicated by the inscription in his prayer book on the occasion of her death in 1858, and which was used to identify his handwriting at his trial in 1866.<sup>9</sup> His eldest sister Catherine is the only one of his siblings whose name occurs in later records.

Growing up, Denis Mulcahy would have been aware of his father's participation at a local level in the politics of 1840s and 1850s Ireland. Denis Mulcahy Senior, a supporter of Young Ireland, was involved in planning for a rising in 1849; reports to Dublin Castle from William Ryan, R.M., Clonmel, stated that he was the head of the secret society in his area and was very active swearing in the farmers in the Parish of Kilgrant or Powerstown. Also involved was his brother, John Mulcahy who had recently been evicted from a large farm at Rusco (Roosca) near Cahir.<sup>10</sup> Years later, Thomas Clarke Luby referred to Denis Mulcahy as a 'fine old '48 and '49 man'.<sup>11</sup> In 1850 he was one of the signatories to a petition to Joseph Kenny, Mayor of Clonmel, calling for a public meeting for the purpose of considering tenant protection, and when that meeting was held, he was among those who addressed the assembly.<sup>12</sup> Later, he was secretary of the Clonmel Tenant Protection Society which he represented at the Council of the Irish Tenant League held in Dublin.<sup>13</sup>

His father's influence probably played a seminal part in Denis Dowling Mulcahy's political development, making the revolutionary ideas propounded by James Stephens particularly appealing to an impressionable young man. They may have first met when Stephens and Luby were on a recruiting mission in Tipperary after the founding of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. They visited people and places where they were known: Luby says that it was Denis's father who introduced him to 'the captain' [Stephens] in or about May 1858.<sup>14</sup> It was possibly at this time that Mulcahy took the oath and was appointed an 'A' and Head Centre for Clonmel.<sup>15</sup>

In 1859 Stephens organised a course in military instruction in Paris for the centres, but it was an ill-conceived project which never really got off the ground. Mulcahy travelled to Paris and it was here that he first met John O'Leary who described him as 'then simply a stalwart young Tipperary man, afterwards sub-editor of the Irish People, then Fenian convict, and now for many years a physician in good practice in Newark, New Jersey, but during all that time the best of fellows, and certainly one of the most affectionate friends I have ever had.'<sup>16</sup>

The funeral of Terence Bellew McManus in November 1861 brought about a huge demonstration of nationalist feeling of which the IRB took full advantage. Deputations from



Etching of Denis Dowling Mulcahy (MS 7698 Courtesy National Library of Ireland)

all over the country marched behind the coffin: Charles J. Kickham, Felix Hugh O'Neill, T.M. Costello and Denis Dowling Mulcahy were the Clonmel representatives. The following day they presented an address to the American delegation at the Shelbourne Hotel.<sup>17</sup>

Prior to the founding of the *Irish People* in November 1863 Mulcahy was involved in organizing and recruiting. With the exception of Joseph Denieffe all contemporary accounts record him as 'a medical student': Denieffe, writing of the arrests in 1865, states that, 'a day or two after, Denis Dowling Mulcahy came into my cell. Denis, being a law student, was allowed to help Lawless take the depositions of the prisoners.'<sup>18</sup> Corroboration of Mulcahy's legal knowledge is contained in evidence given at his trial when a Clonmel solicitor, Richard Vowell, identified his handwriting and stated that the prisoner was connected with his office as an apprentice for a period of fifteen or eighteen months. As Vowell

was by this time partially blind and the apprenticeship referred to occurred eight or ten years previously when Mulcahy was quite young, Isaac Butt contested Vowell's ability to verify his handwriting.<sup>19</sup>

In September 1863 the *Clonmel Chronicle* published an article, without naming names, implying seditious intent on the part of a particular individual. Mulcahy read this as referring to himself and the next day accosted the editor, William Clarke, in Bagwell Street, and demanded to know if he was the author. Clarke repeatedly refused to answer, whereupon Mulcahy hit him on the head. There were several witnesses, including policemen. Mulcahy was arrested, and tried at the Borough Petty Sessions Court where he was fined £2.10.<sup>20</sup>

It was about this time that Stephens was engaged in the preliminary work of setting up the *Irish People*, a newspaper whose objective was the dissemination of the philosophy of the IRB. Though such a project was incompatible with a secret society, Stephens believed that if the organisation had its own newspaper, it would not have to rely on other papers (often hostile) for publicity, and would reach a much wider readership. To this end he travelled round the country, principally in Counties Tipperary and Kilkenny, trying to raise support and, even more important, subscriptions, for the venture. At least one meeting in this connection was held in Redmondstown. Pierce Nagle, the informer, who was employed at the local national school in Powerstown and later worked as a folder at the *Irish People*, stated in evidence at Mulcahy's trial:

I attended a meeting at his father's house in September 1863 before I went to America: there was present at this meeting a man who went by the name of Power and Kelly, and who I

subsequently learned was James Stephens: he was known in the meetings as the head of all the Fenians and was called "Captain"; I heard that he had been involved in the rising of 1848; there was also at this meeting O'Neill Fogarty, a man named Charles Kickham and Mulcahy's father, Denis Mulcahy. Denis Mulcahy is a very old man and took no part in the proceedings. Stephens said that matters were very backward in Clonmel or words to that effect. This meeting occurred at the breakfast table, and was merely conversational. I know of my own knowledge that Stephens slept in Mulcahy's house several nights at that time<sup>21</sup>.

Mulcahy had a longer and closer acquaintance with Pierce Nagle than any of the staff of the *Irish People*. Though they were near neighbours in Powerstown, he had quarrelled with Nagle who had been involved in the establishment of a reading room in Clonmel which was contrary to IRB rules. They were not on speaking terms when Kickham persuaded him in September 1863 to allow Nagle back into the IRB.<sup>22</sup>

An able and talented editorial team and staff were crucial for the success of the newspaper; John O'Leary and Luby were involved from the start; others such as Charles J. Kickham, O'Donovan Rossa, John Haltigan from Kilkenny, Denis Dowling Mulcahy and James O'Connor were also brought on board. The historian R. V. Comerford claims that in choosing these men Stephens may have been motivated by considerations other than picking the best personnel for the paper. Under his eye in Dublin, they were less of a potential threat to his own position as 'all five ... carried very considerable weight locally and had far more personal influence than Stephens wished any of his subordinates to enjoy.'<sup>23</sup>

The publication on 28 November 1863 of the first number of the *Irish People* was to herald a new phase in the life of Denis Dowling Mulcahy.

### **The *Irish People* and Imprisonment**

O'Leary was editor of the new publication, Kickham and Luby co-editors, while Mulcahy was a reader. During the first year Luby acted as sub-editor in order to train Mulcahy, but after that, Luby writes, 'Denis assumed the duties of sub-editor and fulfilled them as well as I did, probably, I should say, better than I did.' The leaders were written by O'Leary, Kickham and Luby, a few by Rossa and 'Denis Mulcahy a few - one certainly - also a review.'<sup>24</sup> A feature of the paper was the letters section in which correspondents wrote on local and national events under a pseudonym. Using the nom-de-plume 'Jim Long' Mulcahy excoriated the money lenders of Clonmel who lent money to the poor at 150 - 200% but whose usury was not denounced at the Mission whereas the Fenians were. He also attacked the Catholic Church which was quite prepared to squeeze the last penny from those who could least afford it and at the same time turn a blind eye to the sins of those who exploited the weakest in society.<sup>25</sup> To the editors, clerical hostility was one of the paper's principal enemies, manifested by denunciations of the IRB from the pulpit (evidenced in the letters written by John Sarsfield Casey 'The Galtee Boy')<sup>26</sup> and particularly by the pastorals of Archbishop Cullen.

While working at the *Irish People* Mulcahy also continued with the organisation of the movement in Clonmel. IRB supporters were predominantly artisans, clerks, people of small means; O'Leary claimed that it was principally due to Mulcahy's exertions that 'a certain portion of that strong farmer class (inconspicuous elsewhere) to which his own father belonged, was brought into the movement.'<sup>27</sup> Nagle's reports to Superintendent Daniel Ryan at the Castle recorded 'Mulcahy is still in Clonmel working up the Fenians of that quarter'



Prison Photograph of Denis Dowling Mulcahy, Fenian  
(MS 7698 Courtesy National Library of Ireland)

and refer to him as 'Head Centre Clonmel and member of Head Committee.'<sup>28</sup> Existence on the salary paid to the staff must have been fairly precarious at times as Luby, writing to O'Leary, recalled frequent shortage of funds to pay salaries, saying, 'One week I had nothing to give Mulcahy, save humorous remarks on abstinence, which made him look on me as a hard-hearted devil.'<sup>29</sup> Luby also recalled how even at this early stage Mulcahy and Stephens had their differences, 'You remember of course, how you and I successfully stood in the way of "Jim's" malicious design to dismiss him from the staff of the paper'<sup>30</sup> though he does not elaborate on the circumstances. It may have been that Mulcahy, who was outspoken and headstrong, resented the autocratic control exercised by Stephens and expressed his opinion.

Mulcahy was not on the premises when the newspaper office at 12 Parliament St. was raided on 15 September 1865. At that time

he and his sister lived at 2 Merrion Terrace, though it was in a vacant house in the area, Merrion House, Merrion View Avenue, that he was arrested on 28 September.<sup>31</sup> He was remanded and brought before Chief Magistrate Stronge on 12 October on a charge of conspiracy; Pierce Nagle identified his handwriting on some incriminating correspondence which included a letter to Stephens headed Redmondstown dated September 1858.<sup>32</sup> He was sent for trial, which took place on 19 January 1866.

In order to expedite the Fenian trials, the government set up a special commission. Trial was by jury, but one of the judges was William Keogh who had betrayed the ideals of the Tenant League by accepting office at Westminster; notorious also for the severity of his sentences, he was anathema to the Fenians, and had been the subject of adverse criticism by the *Irish People*.<sup>33</sup> Arraigned on a charge of treason-felony, Mulcahy was sentenced to ten years penal servitude and transferred from Mountjoy to Pentonville on 10 February.<sup>34</sup> After three months in Pentonville, he was sent to Portland on 14 May. One of those in Portland was John Casey 'The Galtee Boy' who later wrote an account of his prison experience. After the solitary confinement of Pentonville, even the unrelenting work of quarrying and working stones in Portland at first proved bearable as the men were allowed to converse with one another, but after a month even this was not allowed. It was in Portland, before the arrival of a Catholic chaplain, that Mulcahy was appointed to read the Bible aloud to his fellow prisoners. The readings turned into an occasion of light relief as he selected texts which reflected their position and in the context carried a subversive meaning. Rossa described it as 'the most treasonable preaching ever I heard.'<sup>35</sup>

An appeal made on the grounds of the validity of his conviction was heard in November 1866 and he was returned to Mountjoy. The change in his appearance due to the privations and brutality of the British penal system shocked his solicitor, John Lawless, 'I, that had four months professional intercourse with this young man, did not recognise him when I saw him in prison after his arrival, until he extended his hand to me.' His sister Catherine had equal difficulty in recognising him. No communication was allowed between them. The case was heard on 1 December but judgment was reserved until January.<sup>36</sup> Later the same day Mulcahy was transferred to Millbank where he remained until January when he was brought back to Mountjoy. A panel of three judges decided for the Crown and he was re-committed,<sup>37</sup> this time to Dartmoor.

It was during the weeks in Millbank that he inscribed his nickname on the base of his mug, the discovery of which is related by O'Donovan Rossa. Rossa, describing the first morning of his own arrival in Millbank, writes that he examined the cell furniture, including a tin plate and mug,

On the bottom of the pint I found engraved the words 'The Artful Dollier' and my heart leapt as if I was shaking hands with Denis Dowling Mulcahy himself. This was the name we called him in Portland and this was his own writing too. This, then, was the cell Denis occupied when he was in Millbank and this was the pint he took his porridge from.<sup>38</sup>

In Dartmoor he was set to work on the moor, trenching and clearing land, part of which involved carrying slabs of stone on his back. After about three weeks his health gave way; he had a recurrence of the blood-spitting he had suffered in Portland. He spent about half his time in Dartmoor in the prison hospital before the governor requested he be transferred elsewhere. He was moved to Woking in May 1867 on the grounds of invalidity caused by haemoptysis and where he remained until his release. His evidence taken before the Commission of Inquiry at Woking on 29 June 1870, at which he is described as a man of over six feet tall, gives an insight into the prison experiences which may have contributed to his ill-health.<sup>39</sup>

He was released in January 1871 under the terms of the Fenian Amnesty which contained a condition that the remainder of the sentence be spent in exile outside the United Kingdom. The unexpired term of his sentence was five years and twenty-three days: the cost of passage from Liverpool to America was £18.0.0. The total expenses incurred in connection with the release was £35.3.0.<sup>40</sup> He was among the second group of Fenian prisoners released and travelled to the United States on the Cunard s.s. *Russia*. Though they were not allowed off the ship at Queenstown, relatives of the prisoners, among them Catherine Mulcahy, were allowed on board.<sup>41</sup>

### The American Years

Irish nationalism in America was riven by dissension with each faction following its own agenda. It was to Clan na Gael, also known as the 'United Brotherhood', founded in 1867 by J. J. Collins that the newly-released prisoners, including Mulcahy, eventually turned.<sup>42</sup> Clan na Gael in time came to be dominated by John Devoy. Information on Mulcahy's activities during the early 1870s is fragmentary, and in some cases, contradictory: there are references to him by various correspondents in *Devoy's Post-Bag* which imply he was living in America in those years. Denieffe writes that on his release he went to France where he lived for two

years:<sup>43</sup> yet again, he is described as studying medicine for five years in Paris.<sup>44</sup> As early as March 1872 John Boyle O'Reilly wrote to Rossa 'Glad to hear about Dr. Mulcahy, though don't care for him. Mutual feeling, I believe.'<sup>45</sup> (O'Reilly may have been mistaken in his opinion as Mulcahy considered 'there is no Irishman at present in America, who has half as much literary influence as O'Reilly and he merits it'.)<sup>46</sup> Letters with M.D. after his name appeared in the *Irishman* under American Correspondence in 1873. By 1876 he was living at 201 Washington St., Newark, New Jersey.<sup>47</sup>

That he was active in Fenian affairs is evidenced by letters between Dr William Carroll and Devoy in which Carroll refers to plans for the organisation and to O'Leary and Mulcahy's involvement.<sup>48</sup> When John Mitchell died in March 1875 a meeting of Irish nationalists was held in New York to decide the best way to honour his memory: Devoy was in 'the chair, Mulcahy was secretary.<sup>49</sup> The death, a few weeks later, of Sir John Gray, was the occasion of a long letter in which he took issue with the editor of the *Irishman*, writing that the guiding principle of that paper seemed to be *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* when in fact it should be *De mortuis nil nisi verum*. Sir John Gray was the proprietor of the *Freeman's Journal* which in 1865 had printed Archbishop Cullen's pastoral denouncing the Fenians, describing them as infidels and wanting 'to seize the property of those who have any, and to exterminate the gentry of the country and the Catholic clergy'. Mulcahy argued that Cullen's accusations, endorsed by Gray in a sworn affidavit, had done much to deprive the 1865-66 prisoners of a fair trial. So concerned were O'Leary, Luby and Kickham at the time, that they initiated proceedings to restrain the *Freeman's Journal* from commenting on the prisoners.<sup>50</sup>

Towards the end of March 1876 Mulcahy left America for Europe, carrying letters from Devoy to O'Leary in Paris and Kickham in Ireland. He had now completed ten year's exile, the term of his sentence. Before his departure he was presented with an address testifying their friendship signed by T. F. Bourke, O'Donovan Rossa, Devoy, Ronayne, Luby and Harry S. Mulla. The address attributed Mulcahy's patriotism to his father, saying 'he who first taught you what love of country was is now no more.'<sup>51</sup> Denis Mulcahy died in December 1872.<sup>52</sup> An added sorrow for his son was that he was unable to return to the family home. From the mid-1850s Denis Mulcahy was beset by financial problems. To raise money he had had to sell inherited property in Mary St., Clonmel; twice he borrowed from John Burke of Clonmel using Remondstown as surety. Unable to repay this money, he had to foreclose on the mortgage.<sup>53</sup> About 1865 occupancy passed to John Burke.<sup>54</sup>

The visit to Ireland was not a purely personal one. A series of lectures was planned for Ireland and England. The subject matter was always related to national independence with titles such as 'Patriotism, or the Price of Freedom' (Tipperary) or 'What must we do to obtain the Freedom and National Independence of Ireland?' (London). Everywhere he spoke, he attacked Home Rule and those who supported it. 'Mr Mulcahy believes that no nation will achieve its independence without fighting for it, and ridicules the idea of Home Rule ever meeting the wishes of the Irish people.' Throughout the summer he lectured in the towns of the north of England, in Glasgow and Edinburgh and twice in London.<sup>55</sup> He was a very able lecturer as testified by a Mr Joseph Francis writing in the *Daily Express*

His power over his audience is wonderful...it would be difficult to find one better calculated to destroy a rival Irish political movement than this Dr Mulcahy...that the sympathy of the Irish People is not with Home Rule but rebellion is manifest than (sic) the demand through

all the North of England for a lecturer preaching the principles of hatred to England, and boldly and openly denouncing Home Rule.<sup>56</sup>

It was during this visit that the anti-Home Rule faction succeeded in getting the upper hand at a meeting of the Supreme Council held in Dublin in August, which led to the expulsion of O'Connor Power and others who supported Home Rule. Like Mulcahy, Devoy and William Carroll were still, in the mid-1870s, very anti-Home Rule, and while they later changed their stance on the matter, he never did.<sup>57</sup> He gave two lectures in the Rotunda before departing for America in November.

He returned three months later, leading a delegation which accompanied John O'Mahony's remains to Ireland. O'Mahony was in ill-health, living in great poverty when he was found by Mulcahy, some time before his death on 6 February 1877. His funeral to Glasnevin was the occasion of a great nationalist demonstration. Mulcahy did not return to America immediately. Part of his time in Ireland was spent campaigning in the Tipperary by-election of May 1877 on behalf of John Casey, 'The Galtee Boy', who was supported by the IRB. The other candidate was Edmund Dwyer Gray, son of Sir John Gray among whose supporters were Isaac Butt and the Catholic clergy. Casey was defeated in a bitterly fought election.<sup>58</sup>

Mulcahy understood from Rossa before leaving New York that his expenses would be paid. Rossa had set up the Skirmishing Fund in December 1875 and at the time of O'Mahony's funeral thought money could be drawn from it to fund the delegates. When no money was forthcoming Mulcahy wrote to Rossa two or three times but receiving no reply wrote to Devoy, saying that he hoped Devoy would have the money for him on his return early in June. He had had to borrow to cover expenses and rent was owed for the time he was away.<sup>59</sup> In the spring of 1877 the Board of Trustees of the fund had been enlarged; Devoy was now a Trustee and he and Carroll claimed that there was no understanding as regards expenses and no money was available.<sup>60</sup> This was to lead to a protracted and bitter dispute between them, Mulcahy eventually taking a case against the Trustees, in the course of which Devoy referred to him as 'a lunatic...threatening us with a lawsuit'.<sup>61</sup> Mulcahy ultimately lost his case, but then went on to seize the Fenian Ram, the submarine which Clan na Gael had bought from John Philip Holland with the intention of using to attack the British fleet. Relations between the Clan and Mulcahy were at a very low ebb as Devoy wrote to James Reynolds on 17 February 1888, 'I am so sick of the boat and Mulcahy's insane war on us that I should be inclined to let him take the thing and have it for a white elephant if I did not believe that there is a prospect of selling it, if it was only put in decent condition.'<sup>62</sup>

Unlike some of his Fenian contemporaries, Mulcahy did not write his memoirs, but surviving correspondence gives his views on political events in Ireland. Of the oath of allegiance, he wrote to O'Leary, 'I can't see the difference between taking it at Westminster and taking it at College Green'.<sup>63</sup> On Home Rule, he argued that 'it was the sheerest folly to be brought within the power of the land and be condemned to penal servitude for preaching rebellion when one would be content with repeal'. This was an opinion from which he never deviated, and so Parnell and Davitt were subjected to unremitting criticism.<sup>64</sup>

Mulcahy did not always date his letters, so it is sometimes difficult to trace his movements. Writing to O'Leary (possibly in August 1885) from Dunworth House, Queenstown, the home of C. G. Doran, he says that he had been very ill since April with gripe and malaria, but was now greatly improved. This illness, from which he suffered at



# DICTIONARY,

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## Irish Biography and Bibliography

of Irish and Anglo-Irish Authors and Literature; of Irish and Anglo-Irishmen, living and dead, Famous and Infamous; of Recreant Patriots and Repentant Rebels, who have acknowledged the right of England to rule Ireland.

Also of Greek, Roman, Welsh, English, Scotch, French, Spanish, Italian, German, American and other writers, who have treated of Ireland, Historically, Geographically, Topographically, Politically, Religiously, Socially, Commercially, Statistically, etc., giving a list of their works on Ireland, and of the subjects treated in them, with occasional remarks upon them, and copious references to the best sources of information, without regard to Politics, Race, or Religion so that the reader may find the Standard Authorities on the subject which may interest him.

By Denis Dowling Mulcahy, M. D.

Newark, N. J., U. S. America.

23 April 1888  
To Lake Norway

*Dear Mr. Devoy*  
I am preparing a Brief Biographical Dictionary, of Famous and Infamous Irishmen, etc., in which I may insert your name, I will therefore take it as a favor if you will be so good as to fill the subjoined form at your earliest convenience and return it with your Photograph to

Your very obedient servant,

D. D. MULCAHY, M. D.

P. S.—If the party receiving this circular should decline to give the desired information, the author will avail himself of the most reliable at his disposal. If you desire to subscribe please state so.

*P.S. - as so much has been written to your prejudice in reference to your plea when arranged for prison following I should like to have your own account of the matter written prepared in your own personal feeling however strong it may be. I mean to let it to the public.*

intervals for the remainder of his life, was the reason for the trip. He had visited Frank Mandeville, (a nephew of John O'Mahony) at Ballydine, and expected to go to Clonmel but was extremely doubtful that he would be recognised.<sup>65</sup> On visits to Ireland he usually stayed with Doran, who was a Fenian and Clerk of Works in charge of the building of St. Colman's Cathedral.

O'Leary, who had been living in Paris, returned to Ireland in 1885 when his term of exile expired. He and Mulcahy corresponded, mostly on political and literary topics, though irregularly, as Mulcahy complained about lack of letters from O'Leary. In one letter he requested O'Leary to call on some Dublin publishers to find what they would be willing to pay for a translation from the original Latin of the *Historiae Catholicae Ibericae Compendium* of Philip O'Sullivan Beare, with an introduction by himself, or on what terms they would publish it. The manuscript, he said, was the first attempt by an Irishman to give the history of Ireland from the standpoint of a Catholic. D.J. O' Donoghue, author and later librarian at University College, Dublin,<sup>66</sup> wrote that Mulcahy himself was the translator of O'Sullivan Beare's work.<sup>67</sup>

It was in the mid-1880s that Mulcahy embarked on the project which was to become his preoccupation for the remainder of his life. This was a Bibliography of Irish History and Literature; a second work was a Brief Biographical Dictionary of Famous and Infamous Irishmen. Leaflets for the latter were circulated, requesting information from the recipient; a postscript adding that if the person receiving the leaflet did not give the information required, then the author would use the most reliable at his disposal! One of these leaflets, dated 23 April 1888, is to be found in a file among the Devoy papers, Devoy obviously not responding to its peremptory tone.<sup>68</sup> Mulcahy died before the work was ready for publication. When D. J. O'Donoghue wondered in the pages of the *Irish Book Lover* what had become of 'the vast accumulation of material' Mulcahy had compiled, a correspondent replied, 'It was stated in some of the New York papers at the time of his death that Dr. Mulcahy's library was worth 10,000 dollars (£2,000)', adding that 'his fine collection of some 20,000 volumes was sold by auction.' S. J. Richardson, Editor of the New York *Gael* was the purchaser of the majority of the items, among which were a copy of Don Philip O'Sullivan Beare's *History of Ireland*, a manuscript translation into English of a considerable portion of the history, and a manuscript catalogue in Spanish and English containing a list of papers relating to Ireland stored in the Castle of Simancas, in Spain.<sup>69</sup>

O'Donoghue, who knew Mulcahy in later life, gives a number of insights into his character. He wrote that 'exile seems to have embittered Mulcahy more than any other of his associates, and most people came in for unsparing criticism, O'Leary himself not excluded.' This habit of Mulcahy of using very trenchant language in both the spoken and the written word is remarked on by O'Donoghue, who considered him 'a man of remarkably wide reading and a keen literary critic, mostly unjust' but concluded that 'it might be assumed from his letters that he was an ill-conditioned fellow who delighted in annoying his friends; but he was really a big, good-natured kindly man who habitually used stronger language than he meant when he was adopting the role of critic.'<sup>70</sup> While O'Donoghue's shared interests with Mulcahy were principally in the literary sphere, among the Irish-American Fenians William Carroll was another who remarked on Mulcahy's outspokenness. In a letter to Devoy he referred to Mulcahy's initiation into the V.C. (United Brotherhood or Clan na Gael), writing that 'a man of his vehemence of character may have enough

enemies to keep him out'.<sup>71</sup> This was a trait which continued throughout his life as Luby wrote as late as 1889 of 'trying to check his over-hotheadedness'.<sup>72</sup>

While Mulcahy was inclined to hyperbole in speech, his sense of humour, a black humour at times, endeared him to his friends. John Casey was another who described the enjoyment the prisoners got from Mulcahy's Biblical readings in Portland. Casey referred to 'the loud laugh which accompanied Mr. Mulcahy's rich humour' as he, Luby and O'Leary conversed in the stone-breaking yard; this was before an embargo was put on talking at work.<sup>73</sup>

Contemporary references to Mulcahy give differing accounts of his age, which is not to be wondered at, as on occasion, he himself gave conflicting details. Thus in the prison records his date of birth is given as 1840<sup>74</sup> while in the U.S. Census of 1880 he gives his year of birth as 1844 and his age as thirty-six.<sup>75</sup> The circumstances of his birth in 1837 may have led to his reticence to reveal his true age.

While Mulcahy remained single, Devoy referred to a relationship which had an unhappy ending. He wrote that shortly after the arrests in 1865,

... we found Millen at tea with a lady to whom he did not introduce us, and whose face seemed familiar to me, but I did not recall who she was until I heard later that he had married a Miss Power of Tipperary, who was engaged to Denis Dowling Mulcahy, one of those recently arrested. There was strong feeling against both - against her for breaking her engagement, and him for taking a mean advantage of an imprisoned man.<sup>76</sup>

General F.F. Millen was chairman of the Military Council in Dublin in 1865: ordered back to America by Stephens, he was a controversial figure among the Fenians.

Besides his sister Catherine who was a stalwart supporter at the time of his trial and imprisonment, there is little information available about his immediate family. Interviewed by the commissioners in Woking in 1870, he became emotional as he spoke of 'the depressing news of the weak condition of my poor father'.<sup>77</sup> His father suffered from paralysis for the six years preceding his death in 1872,<sup>78</sup> and was too ill to go to Dublin for the trial, though Butt summoned him by telegram to attend.<sup>79</sup>

Another loss which affected Mulcahy was the death of Ellen O'Leary, sister of John O'Leary. Visiting the O'Learys in Dublin about 1885, he had observed that she was not well, but that her brother did not wish to know of her illness. When she died in 1889 Luby wrote to O'Leary that 'nothing could exceed Mulcahy's sorrow'.<sup>80</sup>

Lack of money, particularly in the years after his release, was a constant worry. This may have been what led to the confrontation with Devoy, the lawsuit and the seizing of the Fenian Ram. In correspondence with O'Leary in the late 1880s, Mulcahy refers to money borrowed from the latter on different occasions 'I couldn't remember now how much you lent me when you came to America after your release from prison'<sup>81</sup> (O'Leary's first visit to America after his release was in July 1871).<sup>82</sup> This money, which he now repaid, was to help finance his medical studies.

Kickham, in a letter to Devoy from Mullinahone at the time of Mulcahy's visit to Ireland in 1876, remarked that he hoped Mulcahy would make a little money from his lectures.<sup>83</sup> It appears he did not as years later he wrote rather bitterly to O'Leary, 'I had the Rotunda full twice and I only got from the friends who managed the lectures £22.0.0 for the two lectures'.<sup>84</sup> This was said in the context of a lecture given by Davitt in the Rotunda in aid of

Stephens which realised \$800. This letter to O'Leary in October 1885 illustrates how the early relationship with Stephens had turned to contempt and also his own disillusionment with the Fenian movement. 'I have lost any little respect I had for Stephens since he accepted Davitt's charity sermon..... after all is said Fenianism produced a sorry lot of heroes and martyrs, if you except those who were hanged.' He returned to the subject of Stephens in 1890:

To be candid I am ashamed to acknowledge that I ever recognised Jim as a leader or in any way looked up to him as a man of superior attainment. My only apology is my youth at the time I joined the movement. He was neither an accomplished nor a courageous man. He was utterly incapable of telling the truth except when a lie would not answer his purpose as well. He had no moral character and in the end always justified the means no matter what the consequences may have been to those whom he defamed. He may not have been culpable of betraying Ireland, not that his patriotism was too pure, but he was always ready to betray and belie those whom he believed to be better patriots than himself and at the same time braver men.<sup>85</sup>

Mulcahy died of kidney disease on 12 September 1900 at his home at 77 Bank St., Newark.<sup>86</sup> He died intestate and his estate which was under \$5,000 was administered by the local authority. Of this, books and furniture composed the greatest part, the appointed Appraisers giving a value of \$2893.74 to the 5,328 books.<sup>87</sup> His death was recorded by the *New York Times* (12 September 1900) which noted that he had been in failing health for some time and that he claimed to have no family or relatives. Giving a strange twist to the end of his life, the writer continued,

Margaret Woods claimed to be his wife and some time ago brought suit for divorce, but failed to appear when the issue was joined and the bill was dismissed. Dr. Mulcahy denounced her as a blackmailer. Dr. Mulcahy was a familiar figure in Newark and was known to thousands.

A son of T. C. Luby writing to O'Leary after Mulcahy's death, referred to this as 'the entanglement', an affair which O'Leary had called 'a horrible romance', but unfortunately neither gives any information on the matter. In the writer's opinion 'the entanglement' killed Mulcahy as surely as would have an incurable disease. Through it he lost interest in life, his medical practice was affected and consequently his reputation. Luby described it as the greater of the two overwhelming misfortunes in his life during his time in America. The other and lesser was the Parisien lawsuit to which he attributed the fact that Mulcahy never rose to eminence in his profession, even though he was highly regarded in medical circles.<sup>88</sup>

Surviving correspondence does not throw light on the reason for this lawsuit except that it was successful. Mulcahy himself wrote to O'Leary (2 September 1896) 'I won my case in France notwithstanding the determined opposition of the American and French lawyers...the lawyers there congratulated me on my good judgment of French and foreign law'.

In his later years he returned to Ireland a number of times. In 1896 on what may have been one of his last trips, he visited his cousins in Clonmel and also his old home in Redmondstown and (with two exceptions) found everyone and everything changed. Rather poignantly he remarked, 'it appears to me that there is a time in our lives when we find we are forgotten or almost forget the past.'<sup>89</sup> A month later he wrote to O'Leary 'there are three

of us, you, Luby and myself and mayhaps no other three living Irishmen have as strong an affection for each other'.<sup>20</sup> That the affection was returned is to be seen in the correspondence of both men.

His father's involvement in the 1849 movement and the romantic nationalism which characterised the writings of the Young Irelanders were the major influences on the development of the political consciousness of Mulcahy. Separation from England was for him the only solution to the ills which beset Ireland, a solution in which he believed passionately and which his sentence of penal servitude only copper-fastened. While Devoy, Davitt and others, being more pragmatic, espoused the path of constitutional politics represented by Home Rule, Mulcahy remained intransigent and utterly opposed to the betrayal of the republican ideal which he believed it involved. His relevance lies in his involvement in the early years of the Fenian movement, especially through the spread of its philosophy in the pages of the *Irish People*. The newspaper helped in the re-ignition of a spirit of hope in the possibility of independence which had lain dormant since the days of Young Ireland. The dominant voices were those of O'Leary, Kickham and Luby, but Mulcahy, as a member of the editorial staff, played a not insignificant role in the furtherance of the aims of the paper, a significance which was recognised by the term and conditions of his sentence.

#### Abbreviations

- FJ Freeman's Journal  
 NAI National Archives of Ireland  
 NLI National Library of Ireland  
 RD Registry of Deeds, Dublin  
 TFP Tipperary Free Press

#### References

- <sup>1</sup>Clonmel Advertiser 8 June 1820  
<sup>2</sup>RD Banfield/Mulcahy 1820 751 87 510622  
<sup>3</sup>Ramsey's Waterford Chronicle 24 July 1823  
<sup>4</sup>NLI MS 5670 Rent ledger in respect of the estate of Lord Lismore at Shanbally 1817-57  
<sup>5</sup>Tipperary Free Press 5 April 1834; D. A. Murphy *The Two Tipperarys* (Nenagh, 1994) p.260  
<sup>6</sup>Report of the Devon Commission, evidence taken at Clonmel, 25 September 1844, No. 831, pp 223-7  
<sup>7</sup>NLI Pos. 2455 Parish of Powerstown  
<sup>8</sup>NLI Pos. 2453 Parish of Clogheen  
<sup>9</sup>NLI Pos. 4052 Transcript of the trial of Denis Dowling Mulcahy before the Special Commission 'Having made her peace with God my good tender affectionate mother breathed her soul into the hands of her Redeemer Christ Jesus on the 7th January 1858 at half past eight a.m.'  
<sup>10</sup>NAI Outrage Papers Tipperary 1849, 27/1490, 27/1520, 27/2674, 27/2704  
<sup>11</sup>NLI Luby MS 331, p.19  
<sup>12</sup>TFP 25 and 30 May 1850  
<sup>13</sup>TFP 16 April 1851  
<sup>14</sup>NLI Luby MS 331, p. 19  
<sup>15</sup>As quoted in Eoghan Ó Neill, *The Golden Vale of Ivowen*, (Dublin n.d.) pp 490-1  
<sup>16</sup>J. O'Leary, *Recollections of Fenians and Fenianism*, Vol. I (London, 1896) p. 114  
<sup>17</sup>Freeman's Journal 11 and 13 November 1861  
<sup>18</sup>J. Denieffe, *A Personal Narrative of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood*, (Reprint Shannon, 1969) p.121 (hereafter cited Denieffe, Personal Narrative)  
<sup>19</sup>NLI Pos. 4052 Transcript of the trial of Denis Dowling Mulcahy  
<sup>20</sup>Clonmel Chronicle 9,12, 16 September 1863

- <sup>21</sup>TFP 3 October 1865; FJ 4 December 1865 (Report of the trial of John O'Leary): M. Ramón, *A Provisional Dictator, James Stephens and the Fenian Movement*, (Dublin, 2007) p. 176
- <sup>22</sup>NLI Pos. 4052 Transcript of the trial of Denis Dowling Mulcahy
- <sup>23</sup>R. V Comerford, *The Fenians in Context*, (2nd ed. Dublin, 1998) p. 98
- <sup>24</sup>NLI Luby MS 333, pp 31, 25
- <sup>25</sup>Irish People 5, 26 November, 3 December 1864, letters signed Jim Long
- <sup>26</sup>Irish People 21 September, 22 October 12 November 1864, 21 January 1865, letters signed The Galtee Boy
- <sup>27</sup>O'Leary, *Recollections of Fenians and Fenianism*, Vol. 1, p. 180
- <sup>28</sup>NAI Fenian Police Reports Box 2, 50 (2) Tipperary 1 September 1864
- <sup>29</sup>NLI Luby MS 333, p. 9
- <sup>30</sup>NLI Luby MS 333, p 13
- <sup>31</sup>NLI Pos. 4052 Transcript of the trial of Denis Dowling Mulcahy; FJ 29 September 1865
- <sup>32</sup>FJ 13 October 1865
- <sup>33</sup>R. V. Comerford, *Charles J. Kickham*, (Dublin 1979) p. 83
- <sup>34</sup>*Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Treatment of Treason-Felony Convicts in English Prisons. Together with Appendix and Minutes of Evidence* [C319] HC 1871, xxxii (hereafter cited *Report into Treatment of Treason-Felony Convicts, 1871*).
- <sup>35</sup>John Sarsfield Casey, *The Galtee Boy*, (Dublin 2005) pp 177-190; J. O'Donovan Rossa, *My Years in English Jails*, (Tralee 1967 edn.) p. 101
- <sup>36</sup>Irishman 10, 24 November, 1 December 1866
- <sup>37</sup>Irishman 19 and 26 January 1867; see FJ 18 January 1867 for contrasting report
- <sup>38</sup>O'Donovan Rossa, *My Years in English Jails* p. 147
- <sup>39</sup>*Report into Treatment of Treason-Felony Convicts, 1871* (n. 34 above)
- <sup>40</sup>*Return of the Names of the Fenian Convicts Recently Released, Showing in Each Case the Offence: the Date of Conviction: the Sentence: the Term of the Sentence Unexpired: the Cost of Passage Money Provided: and the Total Expenses incurred with the Release.* HC 1871, lviii, 461
- <sup>41</sup>Irishman 21 January 1871
- <sup>42</sup>W. O'Brien and D. Ryan (eds.), *Devoy's Post Bag, 1871-1928*, Vol. I (Dublin 1948) p.5
- <sup>43</sup>Denieffe, *Personal Narrative*, p.46
- <sup>44</sup>M. Bourke, *John O'Leary: a Study in Irish Separatism*, (Tralee 1967) p. 135; this appears to be based on Denieffe, *Personal Narrative* p. 46. While *The Medical Register and Directory of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1874) p 452 lists Mulcahy as a medical practitioner, it does not give his qualifications
- <sup>45</sup>NLI Pos. 740 N.Y. Public Library, Margaret McKim Moloney Collection
- <sup>46</sup>NLI O'Leary MS 5926 No. 179
- <sup>47</sup>Fenian Papers in the Catholic University of America, A preliminary Survey by Séamus Pender in *Journal of the Cork and Historical Archaeological Society*, Vol. LXXV No. 221, Jan.-June 1970, p. 36
- <sup>48</sup>*Devoy's Post Bag* Vol. I, pp 134, 136, 139, 145-6, 149, 152
- <sup>49</sup>Irishman 10 April 1875
- <sup>50</sup>Ibid. 22 May 1875
- <sup>51</sup>Ibid. 22 April 1876
- <sup>52</sup>Ibid. 14 December 1872
- <sup>53</sup>RD Mulcahy/Savage 1860 Bk. 9 86; Mulcahy/Burke 1862 Bk. 10 176; Mulcahy/Burke 1864 Bk. 9 192
- <sup>54</sup>Cancelled Land Books of the Valuation Office for Redmondstown, Co. Tipperary
- <sup>55</sup>Irishman 13 May, 3, 10, 24 June, 29 July, 26 August 1876
- <sup>56</sup>As quoted in Irishman 29 July 1876
- <sup>57</sup>Comerford, *Fenians in Context*, pp 204-7
- <sup>58</sup>Irishman 5, 12, 26 May 1877
- <sup>59</sup>NLI Devoy Papers MS 18,008 (15): *Devoy's Post Bag*, Vol. I, p. 252
- <sup>60</sup>*Devoy's Post Bag*, Vol. I, p. 237
- <sup>61</sup>Ibid. pp 251-2, 301-02
- <sup>62</sup>*Devoy's Post Bag*, Vol. II pp 236, 306
- <sup>63</sup>NLI O'Leary MS 5926, Nos. 141, 143,
- <sup>64</sup>NLI O'Leary MS 5926, No.125
- <sup>65</sup>NLI O'Leary MS 5926, No. 145
- <sup>66</sup>NLI D.J. O'Donoghue MS 786; Henry Boylan, *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (3rd ed. Dublin, 1998)

<sup>67</sup>*Irish Book Lover* Vol. IV, October 1912

<sup>68</sup>Devoy Papers 18,008 (15); a postscript in Mulcahy's handwriting reads 'as so much has been written to your prejudice in reference to your plea when arraigned for Treason Felony I should like to have your own account of the matter. Neither prejudice nor personal feeling however strong should be imported into this subject. I mean to tell the truth as fully as my information will warrant in doing so. Please state here and on the next blank page what you desire to say about your connexion with Fenianism - do not omit Stephens' escape - your imprisonment - the Land League etc. Please give it in chronological order.'

<sup>69</sup>*Irish Book Lover* Vol. I, July 1910, pp 169-170; Vol. II, November 1910 pp 58-59; Vol. II January 1911 p. 95; Vol. IV, October 1912

<sup>70</sup>D. J. O'Donoghue, *John O'Leary and his friends*, in Sunday Independent 22 June-13 Nov. 1913

<sup>71</sup>*Devoy's Post Bag*, Vol. I pp 133-134

<sup>72</sup>NLI O'Leary MS. 5926, No. 53

<sup>73</sup>Casey, *The Galtee Boy*, pp 187-190

<sup>74</sup>*Report into the Treatment of Treason-Felony Convicts, 1871* (n. 34 above)

<sup>75</sup>1880 U.S. Census, Newark, Essex, New Jersey, Family History Library Film 1254776, NA Film No. T99-0776, p. 1316D

<sup>76</sup>Devoy, *Recollections of an Irish Rebel*, p. 75

<sup>77</sup>*Report into Treatment of Treason-Felony Convicts, 1871* (n. 34 above)

<sup>78</sup>General Register Office, Dublin, death certificate 7 December 1872

<sup>79</sup>NLI Pos. 4052 Trial of Denis Dowling Mulcahy

<sup>80</sup>NLI O'Leary MS 5926 No 65

<sup>81</sup>NLI O'Leary MS 5926 No. 179

<sup>82</sup>*Irishman* 12 August 1871

<sup>83</sup>*Devoy's Post Bag* Vol.I 192

<sup>84</sup>NLI O'Leary MS 5926, No. 155

<sup>85</sup>NLI O'Leary MS 5926, No. 191

<sup>86</sup>Death certificate, Newark

<sup>87</sup>A document accompanying the schedule of assets filed at the Surrogate's Office, Essex County, on 11 December 1900 states the estate did not exceed \$5,000. To accommodate all the books there were book cases in every room, even the bathroom and kitchen. There were considerable numbers of oil paintings and pictures; two diplomas in frames testified his professional qualifications. While he may have had confrontations during his lifetime with various members of the clergy, among his possessions were 'three Catholic figures and two strings beads'.

<sup>88</sup>NLI O'Leary MS 5926, No. 85

<sup>89</sup>NLI O'Leary MS 5926, No. 201

<sup>90</sup>NLI O'Leary MS 5926, No. 205

