

# Sketches of the Pope's Irish Brigade – from the portfolio of a sub-officer

## CHAPTER ONE:

### Farewell to Old Ireland

On the morning of 25th of June 1860 (Monday), an unusual bustle was noticeable in the principal street of Ballycasey,<sup>4</sup> county of Tipperary, Ireland. Excited groups of peasantry and artisans were to be seen here and there in the vicinity of "the coach office". As the time for starting the coach approached, the excitement grew more intense [and people crowded] the little room where the clerk sat busily completing his arrangements for that most important event in the daily annals of Ballycasey, the departure of the Dublin mail.

But there surely must be something very unusual this morning, for it is not always that the departure of the coach is watched with such general anxiety. Perhaps it is a party of evicted tenants who are about to set out on their weary journey to [America], but this surmise cannot be correct, for such scenes are of too frequent occurrence in Ireland to create more than a mere passing interest. Besides there is more of curiosity and animation in the looks of those assembled than of sorrowful regret. Perhaps someone famous has been honouring Ballycasey with a visit and following the custom of the country, people are seeing him off. Maybe Dr Cahill<sup>5</sup> has been delivering a series of lectures in the Court house or sermons in the Chapel. But that cannot be the case, for the newspapers remind me [that he is in America]. Then it must be The O'Donoghue,<sup>6</sup> who has dropped in to keep his constituents in good humour, but that can hardly be, after all, for there are no immediate prospects of an election.

But why waste our time in conjecture, while we can ascertain in an instant from that pompous-looking shopkeeper the meaning of this hubbub. That gentleman is Mr Benjamin O'Donnell,<sup>7</sup> grocer and general merchant, an active repeal warden in his day and a great newsmonger and patriot still. He is the centre of a noisy circle of speakers just now and we have only to draw near and listen, to understand the cause of this excitement, so rare in Ballycasey.

"Yes boys," he exclaims, "I'm proud to say it is true, we *are* goin' to send out a few brave fellows, to swell the ranks of the Pope's defenders. Sure, they're rallyin' round his standard from all parts of the European world, from France and from Spain, from Belgium and Poland and Hungary an' it would be a shame and a disgrace to Catholic Ireland to stand lookin' on while such a grand movement was takin' place . . . why, it's nothing short of a new crusade."

"I'm told" interposes a tall grey-haired countryman "there's a power goin' from Knocknahara<sup>8</sup> side and from Father Tom O'Neill's parish."

"I druv over a commercial man to Cappomine<sup>9</sup> on Thursday," chimes in a car-driver, "and shure enough, I heard in the hotel kitchen that there wasn't a young fellow in the place but was breakin' his neck to get out to the Pope."

"Well," resumed Mr Benjamin O'Donnell, "I am glad we are sending someone from Ballycasey at any rate. Oh then if Dan<sup>10</sup> was alive, 'tis he would glory in a movement like this.<sup>11</sup> If it was only twenty years ago, I know some one that would'nt be long thinkin' of going," Mr O'Donnell looked around on his listeners as if conscious that he had said something that entitled him to their admiration.

So then we have got at the cause of the unusual stir. This mysterious movement about which we have seen so many paragraphs in the Irish papers has spread to Ballycasey, which notwithstanding a portentous proclamation headed "Caution – Foreign Enlistment",<sup>12</sup> has determined to send out its little contingent to the army of Pio Nono.<sup>13</sup> We have been reading many rumours for weeks past concerning the departure of young Irishmen in search of work on the Roman railways,<sup>14</sup> but everybody knew that this was only the transparent cover to something of deeper significance . . . known that the Pope was about to form a little army for the maintenance of order in his State and for protection against the predatory inroads of Garibaldi.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, it began to be openly proclaimed that an "Irish Brigade" – a name filled with the brightest reminiscences of glory, was about once more to give its green banner to the breeze on the soil of Italy and the bare thought of this was sufficient to set thousands of young hearts throbbing with feverish quickness.<sup>16</sup>

Letters had already appeared from some of the adventurous spirits who had gone out, graphically describing their progress through Austria . . . The Irish were feasted, caressed and lionised every where they went . . . Those letters had the desired effect at home, and the companions of the writers could not help contrasting the dull monotony of their own lives with the romantic novelty of that opened out to them. The contagion, too, it was asserted, had even communicated itself to the Irish in America . . . *The Nation*, the leading organ of Irish national opinion, fanned the flame by its cleverly written articles; the country papers followed in its wake and some even went beyond it in the boldness of their tone . . . Those bigot rulers of ours, they wrote, have exhumed their musty statute against foreign enlistment simply because of their hatred of the Pope. They are furnishing Garibaldi with arms and ammunition, granting British officers six months leave of absence to join his standard . . . not because of sympathy with the cause of revolution but because of their deep-rooted antipathy to catholicism and because Garibaldi echoed the cry of Stockport rioters and Orange rowdies, "To Hell with the Pope".<sup>18</sup>

Thus reasoned the national journals, and they reasoned aright, for if there is anything on this earth which a vulgar low-born Englishman is taught to loath, it is the Papacy. And if there be one point of "gospel doctrine" on which all pious and charitably disposed English Christians of the middle classes can be found to agree, it is the most cordial detestation of the successor of St Peter. The governing classes of course must pander to the prejudices of the million . . . The consequence was that we were being presented with the strange anomaly of the conservative British government formenting revolution and the *democratic* Irish people supporting constitutional authority, at the same time.

[As the issue became more important in the summer of 1860] *The Times* whined or bellowed as the humour took it and on the other hand, subscriptions in aid of the Papal exchequer were collected with great energy in Irish dioceses. Broad hints were thrown out that the money thus acquired should be spent on equipping and arming an Irish regiment from each province to serve under La Moriciere.<sup>19</sup> To use a favourite expression of Irish

latter-day patriots "the blood of the country was up". . . And truly, it was a sort of "mystic murmur" that rallied the youthful volunteers who were about to cross, not one, but portions of three heaving seas in their desire for military service under the yellow and white banner of the church. They were going, despite *The Times* and the government and they were going from all parts of Ireland. . . Every policeman knew where those emigrants were going and yet not a single policeman could prove it. The government issued a proclamation to deter them from going, yet was made to assist in legalising their journey, for every one of them was furnished with a passport signed by no less a personage than Lord John Russell.<sup>20</sup> . . . This rather long digression is rendered necessary to explain the peculiar state of public feeling at the time [my story begins].

During May and the early part of June, many an Irish town witnessed scenes similar to that which on the morning of the 25th [June] caused such agitation in Ballycasey.<sup>21</sup> [While many of those who went had the support of parents] many a truant son did not wait for his mother's consent . . . but bundled up a change of linen in a pocket handkerchief<sup>22</sup> and hied to the wars on his own account. A certain young gentleman with whom I happened to be very intimately acquainted, one Mr Harry Neville, belonged to the latter class and it is to give him and some half-dozen companions a hearty "God speed" that the good folk of Ballycasey have mustered round the coach office . . . to the great annoyance of the portly driver, who can hardly get his lady-fare inside with the crushing and crowding.

As my friend Neville is a young fellow of some education, has seen a little of the world and is rather comfortably situated at home, it may be interesting to analyse his motives. "A great many feelings in conjunction and no one in particular. Love of fun and frolic, adventure, a fondness for travel, a fancy to see what soldiering really is, devotion for the cause and above all, a burning desire to see an Irish regiment – a real Irish regiment- none of your brick-red abominations but a regiment clad in our own immortal green, Irish in feeling and spirit and aspirations, sending its fame once again throughout Europe and thrilling the old land with hope."

At length the Ballycasey mail is ready to start . . . Half-a-dozen stalwart fellows disengage themselves from the embraces of the crowd and blithely ascend to the roof of the vehicle. A warm-hearted young priest mounts the topmost step to give Neville a parting shake-hands and the last adieus are spoken with friendly fervour . . .

Thus we left our native town, perhaps never to see it again but our spirits were too buoyant to indulge in such gloomy forebodings. The future opened out before us like some bright romantic vista and our hearts were filled with a joyous expectancy. After about three hours drive through the pleasant scenery of Tipperary, we arrived at the Gracetown railway station.<sup>23</sup> After a last grip of the hands with the driver . . . we jumped into a railway carriage and in a moment were flying on the wings of steam to Dublin . . . Arriving at the Kingsbridge terminus we soon found our way to the North Wall and stowed ourselves aboard the steamer *Sea Nymph* bound for Holyhead with a cargo of cows and harvest labourers. At seven o'clock we left our moorings, quickly passed the Pigeon House and Poolbeg, left Kingstown away on our starboard quarter and as the shades of twilight deepened into night, the summits of the Wicklow mountains were lost to our view.

## Chapter Two: **Holyhead to Liverpool**

About three o'clock on the morning of the 26th June, I was awakened by the steward of the *Sea Nymph* saying "Get up, sir, we're in sight of the Head." . . . It is very agreeable to fall asleep after a last look at land on one side of the channel and wake to find that you are in view of land on the other, having escaped all the qualms of sea-sickness. . . . It was a bleak cold morning and that bleak cold Welsh hill which first salutes the traveller from Ireland, rose up in all its uninviting barrenness before me. The harvest-men were collected forward, singing, shouting and talking – the cows were lowing and the sailors were busy hurling ropes on to the landing place, but my six fellow-voyagers,<sup>24</sup> where were they? What! Can those six miserable-looking beings, with such woe-begone countenances, their noses blue and their teeth chattering from the cold be the men who mounted the Ballycasey coach so jubilantly yesterday morning. Their nearest friends could hardly recognise them as they lay huddled together on the quarter-deck, like so many sheep in a frosty field.

There was young Morty Gleeson, pale in the face save dark circles round his eyes; Joe McDonnell and Ned Ryan were even worse, while Timothy Leahy who had boasted the day before that he would bring home Garibaldi's head to make a knocker for Father O'Rourke's hall-door, looked like someone getting over the yellow-fever. "I see boys, you've (had a rough night while I slept)" was my half-salutation, half-interrogatory.

"Yes," replied O'Loughlin, one of the smartest of the lot, with a merry twinkle of the eye, "and I think the best thing we could do now would be (to get a drink)".

And really the morning was so raw that a very Theobald Mathew<sup>25</sup> would hardly have the cruelty to taboo a visit to the nearest public house. The moment the gangway was shoved on board, I sallied forth at the head of my six Brigadiers (looking for a pub he had visited two years previously) . . . I brought my little party to the house of an honest Welshman, exactly opposite the stores of the railway and though my old friend was not up when I knocked at his door, it was not long before a bright fire was blazing in his kitchen-grate and the tea-kettle simmering on the hob. . . . It was a grand sight to see the six hungry Tipperary-men devouring (their breakfast) . . . After astonishing the weak nerves of "mine host" at our exploits in the eating line, we called for beer and long clay pipes. . .

We started by early train for Chester, refreshed and reinvigorated. My companions disposed themselves with the harvest-men and I found myself in the same compartment with the captain of a merchant ship, then lying in Holyhead harbour; a young Frenchman travelling for the sake of information and a trooper of the 15th Hussars who had just claimed his discharge after seeing eleven years service in the East Indies. We were not long on the journey when the sea-captain opened the way to a conversation by exclaiming: "What a number of those Irish fellows come over here this time of the year! I wonder where do they disperse after they get to Chester."

"There is not one of them but comes over regular every season. They know just as well where to drop in for work as one of your sailors knows where to look for a ship. Some of them I daresay, have been a working for the same guvnor year after year, for the past seven years."

"I see some rather respectably rigged chaps amongst them, but they're gangers I suppose."

"Oh they ain't all harvest men as you seen getting into this train," observed the hussar. "Those chaps you saw togged out the best are agoin' to 'list in the Pope's service, I heard."

"Hang the Pope," growled the old sea-dog, "if only I had my will of the despot, I'd have his head cut off" . . . [the reason for this was that the captain had been arrested for forty-eight hours in 1849 when he visited Rome to hear a friend preach against catholicism] . . . and you tell me, there are some Irish fellows here going to enlist in the Pope's army. These Irish are a disloyal, discontented set, never done grumbling. We couldn't trust them tomorrow if there was a French invasion . . . What's Lord John doing? I wonder our government tolerates these Irish fellows going out to prop up the abomination of Popery. I'd glory in dragging one of them before a police-court."

(The captain produces a bottle of rum and hands it around. When the narrator takes the bottle, he proposes a toast)

"Permit me to drink Health and Long Life to His Holiness the Pope." If a bombshell had fallen into the carriage, it could not have produced a more astounding effect . . . The hussar started from his seat, the Frenchman dropped his book, the captain was transfixed with mute astonishment.

[In the conversation that follows the narrator shows his fairness by proposing another toast, this time to the Queen.]

"Here's Health and Long Life to the Good Woman of Windsor. From what I've heard she's a model for every mother in England."

This ended my strange encounter with the captain, who having passed the bottle round for a parting 'pull' got out of the train at Bangor. We arrived at Chester at mid-day. I must not omit bearing testimony here to the beauty of some of the country we had passed through. . . . We changed carriages at Chester and after a short run arrived at Birkenhead, where we took the ferry across the Mersy to Liverpool. My companions were lost in astonishment at the quantity of shipping of all nations in the river . . . The contrast between the traffic of the Liverpool wharves and the deserted aspects of the quays of our capital, was highly suggestive. [In Liverpool] everything bespoke wealth and enterprise and prosperity.

We had the good luck to meet with a Ballycasey man, who lived in the Regent Road, hard by the sign of the Cross-keys<sup>26</sup> and with him we passed the night reminiscing about the old town, until the clock proclaimed bed-time.

### Chapter Three:

## **Liverpool to Hull**

It is only due to the reader who has accompanied me thus far in my narrative, to warn him or her, not to expect any glowing pictures of the sceneries or elaborate descriptions of the cities through which I passed on my way to join the Brigade.<sup>27</sup> My progress was too rapid to enable me to take more than a superficial glance at the various interesting objects,

whether natural or artificial, on my line of route. My mind at the time was too full of other thoughts. [The narrator was struck by the number of people of African origin he saw in Liverpool. Characterising a representative of that race as 'Mr Brown,' treatment in Liverpool was contrasted with the United States, where there was still slavery.]

The Irish form a very respectable and influential body in Liverpool.<sup>28</sup> The Irishmen of Liverpool are neither ashamed nor forgetful of the old faith and the old country. They have built a fine cathedral, established good schools, organised themselves into useful societies. . . They are not to be put down either in purse or person . . .

The cause in which our sympathies were engaged won us many friends during our night's stay in the city . . . We rose on the morning of Wednesday (27 June), fresh and lively as larks and in buoyant spirits for our third day's journey. We were conducted to the Lime Street station by our Ballycasey friend and took the train for Leeds *en route* to Hull, where a large party of volunteers awaited our arrival. Reasons of economy induced us to go by Leeds – not the usual or direct way – for there was no third-class train to Hull to suit us. On looking at my (diary) I note that this stage of our travels is rather summarily dealt with. Here is my note transcribed in full:

"Wednesday June 27 – Started from Liverpool about half past six, securing a compartment to ourselves – gave a rollicking cheer for Tipperary as we steamed out of the station – densely populated, foggy, gloomy-looking country to Leeds, particularly so in the neighbourhood of Manchester – long dimly lit tunnels frequent – factories, factories, nothing but smoking factories right and left – air impure and people of sallow unhealthy appearance – Leeds at midday where we had a short delay – fine town – stopped at Railway Tavern – saw statue of Sir Robert Peel, good – two barmaids in green gowns, very neat – Yorkshire dialect, a cross between the Hottentot and Low Dutch - Yorkshire pudding splendid – off for Hull, delicious country, groves, fertile corn fields, spreading pasturages and rich orchards; this indeed is merry England – distant view of the Humber – Hull in time for a late dinner."

Arrived in Hull, we hastened to the boarding house which had been selected as a rendezvous for the emigrants to Italy. On knocking at the door and making ourselves known, we were immediately ushered into a large room in the back of the premises, where upwards of sixty young fellows, whose nationality there could be no mistaking, were amusing themselves according to their various dispositions. Some were dancing a reel to the lively notes of a flute, whilst their companions gathered around them in a circle and rewarded their exertions with words of praise and encouragement. In another part of the room [other amusements were being pursued]. Our entrance did not provoke any curiosity; we moved up quietly to the end of a long table that ran through the apartment and sat down to a good substantial dinner.

During the meal, I scanned the party rather keenly as this was my first opportunity of forming a personal judgement of the class of Irishmen that were flocking to the standard of the Pope. . . . To my great delight, I recognised the majority of those present to be natives of Tipperary from their familiar accent. They were mostly men under twenty-five years of age, tall straight and handsome. As far as bodily health and strength went, they were apparently fit for any service, whilst to form an opinion from their respectability of attire and decency of demeanour, they were far and away in social position above the class from

which the ranks of the British army are recruited.

After dinner I made it my business to learn as much as I could of my future comrades. On the whole they were a fine hearty set of young fellows, full of animal spirits, ready to do or dare anything and inflamed with the purest enthusiasm for the cause into which they had thrown themselves with such zeal. Many of them made great sacrifices to gratify their ambition to 'fight for the Pope' – for that was the current phrase with them when speaking of the enterprise. Few, very few of them, but were much better off at home than if they occupied the position of a private soldier in any army in Europe.

I made the acquaintance of a young man called Kickham from the vicinity of Mullinahone<sup>29</sup> who seemed to be looked on with much respect by his humbler companions and he gave a good deal of information with regard to the group, to most of whom he was personally known. The greater portion of them came from the South Riding of Tipperary and some few from Kilkenny, with a small sprinkling of Dublin men. They belonged mostly to the agricultural classes; many were the sons and nephews of substantial farmers and many came under the category of 'labouring boys' – fine specimens of the simple single-minded hardy Irish peasant. Some dozen or so of those 'boys' came from a portion of my native county known as the Collieries<sup>30</sup> and my word, they presented such a type of boyishness that one would look at them twice before trying the dangerous experiment of treading on their corns.

One sturdy volunteer was pointed out to me who joined the party rather singularly. They were about to leave the Thurles railway-station, when it was ascertained that one of the men for whom a passport had been procured, had faltered at the last moment. "Boys," exclaimed this young fellow who was on the platform, "since that dirty coward is afraid to come up to scratch, here's one that won't see Tipperary disgraced." A few inquiries having been made into his character, he was immediately accepted and asked was he ready to start there and then. "Shure and I am" replied the impulsive Tipperary man, "for all them bundles and that big chest there belongs to me and I was prepared to go off by the next train to America. So you see boys, I won't have the bother of any lave-takings."

Without further ado the intending emigrant directed a friend to carry home the big American chest, for said he: "Shure, if God spares me, I can go there afterwards." Calling a little girl aside, he put a small roll of money into her hand and was overheard whispering: "Mary alanna, here's my passage money, give it to the ould woman and tell her I'm gone with the rest of the boys to fight for the Pope." Surely this man did not relinquish his prospects in America with a mercenary object and yet the *Times* would try and persuade us that this man and men like him, went to the Roman States [for money].

With my friend Kickham as my guide, I soon made the acquaintance of some of the most remarkable and most intelligent characters in the company. There was a young Limerick man named Buckley who had been in the 78th Highlanders; afterwards made a voyage in the Baltic Fleet under Charley Napier<sup>31</sup> and was now after throwing up his post in the Irish Constabulary<sup>32</sup> to shoulder a musket in the bold Brigade. He wore a medal for the bombardment of Cronstadt and also another, much more to be prized, which had been granted him by the Royal Humane Society for having saved people from drowning.

There were not a few in the room who had been sharers in the exciting perils of the

Indian Mutiny,<sup>33</sup> one of them, Henry St John bore the marks of a wound received at Delhi; another, a fiery little fellow, had a slice of his nose cut off by an insurgent, who paid the penalty of his life for his attempt at fancy carving.<sup>34</sup> The men whose society appeared to be most courted in the company, were one Mr Knaggs [the flute-player mentioned when the writer joined the volunteers at Hull]; Tom Dalton, who learned how to stride a horse in the 16th Lancers and could sing a good song and above all and before all, Jack Casey, or as he called himself, Corporal Casey, late of the Queen's Own Regiment of Dublin Militia . . . full of fun and humour. Our party was further enlivened by the oddities of an ex-student of Tuam College, who when the call came threw up his books. 'Poor Harvey' or as he was better known 'the Collegian' was a guileless good-minded youth, extremely simple in worldly matters and fond of quoting Latin with an unctious Connaught brogue.

We had a counterpart for Harvey in simplicity of manners in the son of a respectable and wealthy farmer from the Golden Vein, named Dan Dwyer, or as a number of retainers whom he brought with him, loved to address him, and he came eventually to be called 'Mister Dan.' I have only to add the names of Mr Michael Walsh, who had occupied a confidential situation under Mr Bianconi – a fine example of the species of men raised near the City of the Kings,<sup>35</sup> and Mr Michael Herbert, a handsome intelligent young fellow, who had been a telegraph manager on the Great Southern and Western Railway.

I had not much time to walk about Hull as we were to leave for Antwerp in the evening but from what I saw of the city, it appeared a much quieter place to live than Liverpool. By special direction, our party was kept within doors as much as possible, as the band of the Rifle Volunteers, some nights before, had played up and down in front of our rendezvous with the intention of starting a row.<sup>36</sup> As our steamer was to sail as soon after 4 p.m. as the tide would permit, which on this evening was about 7 p.m., we made our arrangements to be on board punctually at that hour. As we sallied forth in military array from the rendezvous, seventy-eight in number, and marched defiantly through the streets and by the long line of quays, we were watched and somewhat pestered by a flying column of urchins who called us names. . . . Shortly after seven we boarded the steamship '*Alster* – 480 tons with Joseph Maycock Commander.' The vessel at once pushed out into mid-river and after a few hours got under way for Belgium, the volunteers on her deck giving three cheers as the lights of the port receded from their view.<sup>37</sup>

#### Chapter Four:

### **The Midnight Meeting**

There is very little prospect of sleep on board the '*Alster*' tonight. One would think that her mercurial passengers had roared themselves hoarse as the good ship was leaving Hull, but no, they have only roused themselves into a state of gentle excitement. There they are, gathered in parties of six and seven on every open space of the vessel's deck . . . no sleep thought of for some hours to come.

One group in particular is very boisterous . . . our friends Neville, Kickham, Harvey, Walsh and Corporal Casey . . . from their animated words and frequent bursts of merriment, there is something in the wind . . . they're up to some sort of fun [with Neville as ringleader



– calling all the Volunteers together on deck, Corporal Casey mounted a coil of ropes and addressed them]: ‘Fellow countrymen, this is a cold night. We must do something to keep us warm and as we have no poteen on board, we must try some other plan to keep the blood in circulation . . . I’ll tell you what we’ll do – we’ll hold a meeting of sympathy for the Pope here on board this English ship. For one night in her history, we’ll transform the ship ‘*Alster*’ of Hull into a *little floating Ireland*’. A tumult of applause followed this address. The Captain and a parties of ladies came running from the cabin to see what the Irishrie were about and stood to listen on the bridge.

Then Mr Michael Walsh presented himself to the crowd, or as we must now call it, the meeting. ‘My friends,’ said he, ‘let us proceed in a regular manner. Our first duty is to appoint a chairman . . . I therefore move that Mr Henry Neville do take the chair.’ (This was seconded by Mr Michael Herbert.) The captain here sent down a camp-stool with his complements to Mr Neville . . . the meeting evidently was getting into the spirit of the thing and the captain and his ladies smiled at the cleverly-acted burlesque. ‘Order,’ shouted Corporal Casey who constituted himself fugleman<sup>38</sup> to the crowd of applauders.

‘My friends and fellow-countrymen,’ commences Neville with due rhetorical gravity and emphasis, ‘. . . I am overpowered with emotion . . . I will yield to none in devotion to the cause we have met to honour [applause]. I will now be happy to hear any gentleman who has a resolution to propose, or rather a speech to make, for I think we had better dispense with the formality of resolutions.’ A general call was made for “The Collegian,” who modestly mounted the rosey rostrum. The voice of Corporal Casey is heard, demanding order for Mr Harvey’s speech and Mr Harvey forthwith opens as follows: ‘. . . My beloved fellow-countrymen, when I see you all, I feel inspired . . . The political horizon is lost in darkness . . . be it ours to watch beside the Pope during this crisis, to guard him during this storm . . . the powers of evil are now leagued against him . . .’ Tom Dalton next came forward and shouted out at the top of his clear manly voice: ‘Lads, I won’t detain you long. All I’ve got to say is Garibaldi is a brave man, so much the better, the greater the merit of the men that will lick him . . .’

At this stage of the proceedings, Corporal Casey called on Mr Neville at the particular request of the company, to favour them with a few more words . . . ‘Comrades, I am not a man of words, nor do I wish to be so accounted. There have been too many men of words in Ireland in latter days. The genius of talk has been elevated on a pedestal and crowds of worshippers have prostrated themselves before it. . . . We want less talk and more action. Unfortunately, any man who mounts a tub in our country to ventilate his theories is sure to attract a large audience . . . Once upon a time, there was a song about Irishmen which said they were more prone to practice than to plan but alas, that tune is changed and Irishmen nowadays are more prone to plan than to practice, readier to whine than to put their shoulders to the wheel . . . One action is worth all the speechification that was ever spouted forth in the Corn Exchange and the Conciliation Hall<sup>39</sup> put together . . . We want men of action . . . Six months ago, my friends, the Pope called his faithful children all over the world to show the depth and sincerity of their faith. Meetings were held in Ireland in the holy churches and the holy Bishops sat in the chair. The priests and the gentry and the shopkeepers and the farmers assembled in the shadow of the Cross to testify their devotion to the Cross. The mechanic and the peasant rallied around their pastors likewise

and all . . . proclaimed that they were faithful to the Church of their Fathers. Everywhere over our land those meetings were held, thanks be to Providence it was proved that the spirit of Ireland had not been crushed out by famine . . . the Times and those whom it represents, threw it in our faces that we would shout for the Pope but would not unloosen our purse-strings . . . Baffled there, they next taunted us that we would speech for the Pope and subscribe for the Pope, but would not raise an arm in his defence . . . This very ship, on whose deck we are now gathered, is wafted on its way by many a mother's blessing . . .'

Symptoms of intense excitement showed themselves pretty generally through the meeting at this point . . . Mr Garrett O'Loughlin of Ballycasey was the next orator: ' . . . I think politics is a great humbug . . . my own simple ideas . . . what brings us all here? Love for religion and something else . . . and what's that? . . . We won't wait to ask if the Pope is right or wrong; it's enough for us to know that Englishmen help Garibaldi and what they help can't be honest or pure or have the grace of God about it. Sure if we never did the Pope a ha'porth of good at all, we're vexing them and that itself is a consolation after all the heart-burnings they caused our country. Now boys you should always keep your wits about you when you're travelling . . . What did I see in Holyhead? Hundreds of poor starved-looking Connaughtmen coming over to England to reap the harvest . . . remember they came from a country able to support ten times its population. What did you see in Liverpool? More ships in one day than you'd see in all the harbours and rivers of Ireland in a twelvemonth. What did you see from that to Manchester? A country full of riches and prosperity, while we read in Irish history that they made laws to keep down our enterprise and to crush our manufactures. What did you see everywhere in England? Volunteers marching in their uniforms with brand new rifles – if you were seen marching in Tipperary, boys, what would be the consequences? Go ask your brothers who lie without a headstone in far Van Diemen's Land.<sup>40</sup> But thank God, in spite of them we shall soon be able to march and wear the green and maybe there might be another '82<sup>41</sup> in Ireland yet [cheers] What did you hear everywhere you passed through England? The Pope cursed and the Irish damned . . .'

[The meeting was brought to a close with a few songs including "*The Bold Tipperary O*"] In half an hour all was still, and some were dreaming of quiet firesides in Ireland, and some of the clash of arms in Italy.

### Chapter Five:

## **The Humber to the Scheldt**

Morning at sea . . . The buoyancy of our noble ship communicated itself to our spirits . . . The volunteers were in the happiest of moods . . . They loll about in every posture of lazy ease . . . There is a sort of tent-like enclosure amidships covered with a huge tarpaulin, with a number of planks stretched alongside which do duty as seats. Here the volunteers found shelter last night and here now (some are playing cards). . .

My head grows dizzy. I find it rather difficult to keep my footing . . . [The writer and the other volunteers become sea-sick] . . . Next to Harvey, the greatest sufferer appeared to be Timothy Leahy of Ballycasey, whose brawny chest was heaving convulsively with the

spasms of the dread sickness . . . After a couple of more hours rough weather, the gale slackened and the sea gradually calmed down. About five o'clock the look-out sighted the coast of Zealand and just as daylight was melting into dusk, we entered the Scheldt . . . An odd windmill and an odd cottage could be seen rising out of the flat country . . . Night had now fallen and the Captain determined to lie to in mid-stream, as the navigation is difficult in the dark.

A small boat comes alongside, some words are spoken in a strange guttural tongue, a ladder is lowered and a heavy-barrel of a man, closely wrapped in comforters and pea jacket, ascends with difficulty and the boat darts swiftly into the shade. It is the pilot who has come on board and the Irish gather around him with great curiosity (but) to their great disappointment, the gruff old pilot looks for all the world like a gruff old man in the country they have left.

This is another of the cold nights [and there is difficulty finding a comfortable place to sleep]. Some have lain to sleep on the grating over the furnace of the engine; others have burrowed in a recess under the bows but the great majority are huddled together in the [shelter] amidships. As I pace up and down the deck to warm myself, a figure emerges from the bowels of the vessel . . . It is a stoker, who has been baking in the engine – room. The poor fellow earns his bread hard. I find him an intelligent fellow. He tells me he has been baking in the hot air of the engine since he was thirteen and now he is turned five and fifty . . . 'The *A/ster* behaved very well coming over,' I ventured to remark. 'Oh yes sir, she's both swift and seaworthy, that she is. I've weathered many a gale in her. We were chartered by the government during the Crimean war and it was said she was one of the quickest steamers that ever entered the Black Sea.'

We entered into conversation on the Brigade and I learn that the ship conveyed two hundred volunteers across, the voyage before, under the conductorship of a young German nobleman, the Baron they called him . . . I asked the stoker what his opinion was of the whole movement. He said he thought the business would turn out badly. He remembered a lot of wild fellows going out to the Spanish legion under General Evans,<sup>42</sup> some years ago. Many were starved or slain and the rest came home beggared, maimed and ragged. [When the writer retires to the shelter amidships he finds that] . . . The boys had hit on a new plan of amusement. They were waking the unfortunate Harvey, who had not yet recovered from his sea-sickness. The versatile corporal, acted as master of ceremonies and was earnestly exhorting the boys to behave themselves in respect of the dacent man that was laid out – the heavens be his bed this night! . . . As I was sadly in want of rest, I quitted the noisy corpse-house and took myself off to the galley [where I was soon asleep].

### Chapter Six:

## **First Day on the Continent**

(With) the first grey streaks of dawn, a cold misty atmosphere around us – a broad sluggish river beneath, before and behind - a dull flat country on either side. Such was our impression of Dutch climate and Dutch scenery, as we floated on the Scheldt on SS Peter and Paul's Day.<sup>43</sup> . . . our steamer moored alongside the quay of Antwerp. A stout

jellied-face gentleman, with a courier-bag slung by his side, jumps on board and bids us welcome, not in French or Flemish but in Hibernian English, seasoned with the raciest of Munster accents. 'Who has the passports?,' inquires the jolly Munsterman, 'my name is O'Flynn and I don't think ye'll have any objection to come along with me to breakfast.'

This stout gentleman was Dr O'Flynn, from Waterford but a longtime resident in Belgium and now assistant surgeon in the Irish Brigade and medical officer in charge of the depot at Malines.<sup>44</sup> A parting cheer for the good ship "*Alster*" and we sprung on Belgian land, delighted to find solid earth again under our feet. [There followed a long account of the history and culture of Antwerp.]

Spirit of Tristram Shandy<sup>45</sup> save me from further digression . . . Dr O'Flynn (leads us) to the railway terminus . . . A short run by train brought us down to Malines. The Belgian railway system is the most complete in Europe . . . The only difference (to Ireland) I observed was that the carriages were generally open, that the guard carried a bugle instead of a whistle and that smoking was not prohibited. [He notes the Belgian countryside as similar to that in England.] On getting out of the train at Malines, we were conducted to comfortable lodgings, where we were billeted for the day. Myself and a party of twenty were quartered in an auberge opposite the railway station, presided over by a homely Flemish landlady. The good woman did all in her power to make us happy and laughed with wonderous pleasure at the enormous quantities of cake and coffee that disappeared before our inroads. It was a second edition of the infamous breakfast at Holyhead.

After a wash and a few games of skittles in the yard of the inn, we were waited on by a handsome little gentleman with pink cheeks and light hair, who produced from under his arm a bundle of documents which looked very official. They were no less than the enlistment papers of the Irish Brigade and the handsome gentleman who belonged to the staff, had come to enlist us. After several memoranda as to the place of our nativity, the maiden name of our mothers, our ages, height and colour of eyes etc., had been jotted down by the little gentleman, he handed us severally a large paper headed: "Grand Priory of the Military Order of St John of Jerusalem." This paper set forth that the undersigned bound himself to serve the Pope and his successors, faithfully for the term of four years, to maintain Rome as the capital of the Papal States and not to get married. In return for this, the 'undersigned' was to be granted all the pay and privileges of foreign soldiers in the Papal service and the Holy Father promised that the Irish should be formed into a distinct body, preserving their features as a national corps and to be officered by men of Irish birth or extraction and no others. To which conditions, the name 'McDonnell for Field Marshal Nugent, the Grand Prior,' was affixed.<sup>46</sup>

I remember while the process of enlistment was going on, a volunteer who had been out somewhere, came in and was asked to sign one of the papers. He did so without hesitation. 'Do you know what you are after signing,' asked the little gentleman. 'Why then, I don't,' replied Paddy. 'I'd advise you never to sign any paper till you read it first. You're after signing your death-warrant,' facetiously remarked the little gentleman. 'The divel may care,' recklessly responded Paddy. And thus seventy-eight young Irishmen were transformed into Knights of the Military Order of St John of Jerusalem.

We went to mass to the cathedral, which we found to our great gratification, was dedicated to St Rumold, an Irishman and a native of Dublin.<sup>47</sup> [There follows a brief account

of the saint and the cathedral.] On our way back from the cathedral, we were met by an elegantly dressed old man, of aristocratic appearance, who took off his hat most politely to us and in excellent English expressed his sympathy with the sacred cause we were going to defend. He was not a Belgian, he said, but a native of Lyons. I suspected he was an émigré belonging to the old Legitimist nobility, and probably had been invited to leave his native land by Louis Napoleon.<sup>48</sup> Malines seemed to be a favourite resort with this class, for it was somewhere in its vicinity that La Moriciere<sup>49</sup> fixed his residence during a great portion of his exile. [There follows an approving account of Malines and an argument for more urban public spaces back home. Then the writer discusses the Belgian character – “The women are interesting rather than handsome . . .”]

(The Belgians) have every reason to be proud of their revolution in 1830. A few days resolute fighting then gained for them independence<sup>50</sup> and a place on the map of Europe as a distinct nationality and as a result of native legislation, their commerce and manufactures have since increased tenfold. . . . Here is a lesson from Irishmen . . . On returning to my billet, I found that a request had been sent to the newly-made knights to pay a visit to the ecclesiastical seminary attached to the cathedral. Accordingly, they were ‘fallen in’ two deep and after a slight inspection, marched down. As they passed through the streets, shouts of ‘Vive le Papa’ blended with Irish cheers, rang forth. The Irishmen stepped out proudly as if they felt that now indeed they were soldiers. A party of Belgian soldiers stopped to admire them, the word ‘eyes left’ was given, the officers acknowledged the complement with a bow. A very agreeable half-hour was spent with the students who patted the volunteers on the back and looked and gesticulated the warmest feelings towards them. One of them who spoke a little English, got up in the rostrum of the study hall and addressed a few simple elegant sentences to his dear brothers from good Ireland, whom he cheered on in their mission.

On departing, a most affecting scene took place, the students distributed little portraits of Pius the Ninth, as souvenirs, and as the Irish marched off, many a youthful student cast wistful glances after them, as if anxious to exchange the breviary for the sword. The volunteers were dismissed to their billets with directions to be again ready for the road at six o’clock in the morning. I cannot say how they got on elsewhere, but we wound up the evening at the ‘Railway Inn’ most jovially, drawing enormously on our landlady’s beer and fraternizing most affectionately with (the locals) who were lost in admiration and wonder at our uproarious enthusiasm, our songs, sentiments and speeches and above all, our wild hip-hip-hurrahs.<sup>51</sup>

## Acknowledgments:

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## References:

1. *Tipperary Advocate*, 25 Aug 1860
2. *DNB*, (Supplement 1901-11), p.56.
3. *T.A.*, 28 July, 25 Aug 1860
4. Nenagh, Co Tipperary.
5. Now forgotten but William Cahill (1796-1864) Roman Catholic priest was in his day a very famous polemicist and lecturer on current issues., especially religion. Archbishop Cullen of Dublin had his reservations about him. Cahill went to the United States in December 1859 and remained there to his death. His body was returned to Ireland in 1885 amid great excitement.
6. Daniel O'Donoghue (1833-1889) was MP for County Tipperary since 1857. A native of Kerry, his mother was a niece of Daniel O'Connell. In his time, seen as an important Irish figure but one whose potential was never realized.
7. Probably based on such a Nenagh merchant – pillar of the nationalist community and exactly the kind of figure from an older generation who encouraged young men on what was seen as a great adventure.
8. Perhaps Youghalarra
9. Perhaps Silvermines
10. Daniel O'Connell
11. Or perhaps not, O'Connell might have been too struck by the contradiction of supporting nationalism at home while volunteering against it abroad.
12. On 13 May 1860 the government issued official warnings in the names of the heads of both the Dublin Metropolitan Police and the Irish Constabulary, reminding everyone that enlisting in a foreign army was against the Enlistment Act (59 Geo. III c.60)
13. "Pio Nono" popular expression of the name Pius IX, the pope the Irish volunteers were going to defend. He was born in 1792, elected pope in 1846 and having one of the longest reign in papal history, died in 1878.
14. A frequently used cover story was that young Irishmen were emigrating to Italy to work on the railway there. This was to get round the Enlistment Act. Of course no one believed this story. It was not as if huge numbers were not emigrating every day anyway.
15. Under other circumstances Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882) might have been a hero of nationalist Ireland. He led the movement for Italian unification and independence, which however was a threat to the Papal States.
16. The popular idea of Irishmen fighting under a collective identity in foreign armies, especially after the Treaty of Limerick, was a powerful one and certainly influenced what was happening in 1860. For a detailed treatment see D. Murphy, *The Irish Brigades 1685-2006* (Dublin, 2007)
17. Founded by the Young Ireland movement in 1842, the death of Thomas Davis in 1845 was a serious blow. Controlled since 1858 by A.M. Sullivan (1829-1884) who enthusiastically supported the Papal cause.
18. When in 1850 the Pope declared his intention to restore a Catholic hierarchy in England, the government reacted with legislation to make this illegal (Ecclesiastical Titles Act of 1851). The episode produced the last great outburst of official and popular anti-catholic agitation in England, with anti-catholic riots in various places. Some individuals noted the irony of Britain supporting nationalism abroad while suppressing it at home. In truth, it was difficult to separate support and admiration for Garibaldi and opposition and mistrust of the papacy.
19. Louis Christophe Leon Juchault de la Moriciere (1806-1864) , a French general who made his reputation in North Africa but who fell out of favour and spent the 1850s in exile when Louis Napoleon took power. In 1860 La Moriciere took command of the Papal army and thus was in command of the Irish volunteers. The small Papal army stood no chance against the vastly superior forces ranged against it.
20. Lord John Russell (1792-1878) was Prime Minister 1846-52 and 1865-66. In 1860 he was Foreign Secretary in the government of Lord Palmerston. It was not forgotten that Russell was responsible for the Ecclesiastical Titles Act of 1851, hence the sly delight at his having to sign the passports in 1860.
21. Reflected in the press: for example the *Times* of 11 June referred to the "enlistment mania" and in a report from Clonmel dated 4 June, eighty seven volunteers were described passing through that town

- on the train from Limerick.
22. A report in the *Times* 15 June mentioned that some of the volunteers had little or no luggage.
  23. Templemore
  24. From records of passport applications, the six can be identified – apart from John A O'Shea, the group consisted of John Gleeson, Daniel Hoctor, James Grady, Joseph McMahon, John O'Leary and James Toohy (CSORP/1860/Box 830, National Archives Dublin)
  25. Fr Theobald Mathew (1790-1856) Apostle of Temperance
  26. a pub
  27. In fact the writer devotes considerable attention to exactly this.
  28. In 1861, Liverpool had a population of around 444,000, of whom 84,000 were born in Ireland.
  29. C.J. Kickham's first cousin James J Kickham.
  30. Around Ballingarry in Slieveardagh.
  31. Admiral Sir Charles Napier (1786-1860) commanded the Baltic fleet during the Crimean War in 1854 when Britain and France were allied to prevent the Russians advancing on Turkey. Napier failed to capture the main Russian port of Kronstadt (near St Petersburg).
  32. In the summer of 1860, the nationalist press made much of the notion that there were wholesale resignations from both the Dublin Metropolitan Police and the Irish Constabulary in order that men could go off and fight for the Pope. Equally newspapers like the *Times* were at pains to minimize the importance of this; for example on 15 June 1860 making the point that in May 1859 there were 32 resignations compared to just 36 a year later.
  33. In 1857 when native regiments in India revolted, giving the British a huge shock until order was restored with great brutality on both sides.
  34. Note that the writer expresses no sympathy for the Indian insurgents – an attitude in which race mattered far more than politics.
  35. Part of the contingent from Boherlahan and named as one of the twelve who volunteered from there. For the Walsh family, see B. Gough, John Walsh III and the Bianconi Connection in *Boherlahan-Dualla Historical Journal* (2004), pp 110-15. Also, article on these Boherlahan volunteers in the same (2009).
  36. The recollection of another volunteer, Stephen Walsh of Thurles, confirms this detail (*Tipperary Star*, 12 Aug 1938)
  37. The *Tipperary Advocate* of 30 June in a story headed "Emigrants to Italy" describes how a hundred "emigrants" from Thurles, Ballingarry, Tipperary, Roscrea and Nenagh had departed on the steamer "Alster" from Hull on Wednesday evening (27 June). It was noted that a young man from Nenagh (unnamed) was in charge and that he had for the moment abandoned a career in journalism. Readers were promised that there would be a series of letters from him.
  38. A kind of model soldier copied by others.
  39. An attack on O'Connellite politics.
  40. Tasmania, a penal colony.
  41. In 1782 the volunteer movement in Ireland seemed to promise a measure of self-determination.
  42. Sir George de Lacy Evans (1787-1870) Limerick-born soldier who led an army of volunteers to Spain in the late 1830s during the Carlist War.
  43. 29 June – They left Nenagh on the 25th
  44. Flynn's father owned the *Waterford Chronicle* newspaper.
  45. A long and discursive novel from the 1760s by Clonmel-born Laurence Sterne.
  46. Field Marshal Prince Nugent and Count MacDonnell were Austrians of Irish ancestry. The business of joining the Order of St John was part of the Vatican's way of controlling the enlistment of foreign soldiers and of their effort not to annoy the British government – too much.
  47. Little is known about him, also called Rumbold or Rumbout, 8th century and martyred in Malines. He is the patron saint of Malines diocese.
  48. In 1860 ruler of France as Napoleon III.
  49. See note 18 above.
  50. From the Netherlands.
  51. The account ends here. O'Shea left Nenagh on 25 June, was in Holyhead on the 26th, Liverpool on the 27th, Hull on the 28th, Antwerp and Malines on the 29th, Cologne on the 30th. Leipzig on 1 July and Bodenbach (Germany) on the 2nd. Their immediate destination was Vienna. (*Tipperary Advocate*, 7 July 1860)