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Address of
Honorable Francis Biddle
Attorney General of the United States

Annual Dinner
of
The Friendly Sons of St. Patrick
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Wednesday, March 17, 1943

9:00 P.M. E. W. T.

For us Americans St. Patrick's birthday is a national holiday - not legally, it is true, but what Irishman ever cared whether the law was with him on a holiday. So far as I know, I have no Irish blood in my veins. But the Irish, God bless them, claim me occasionally, as when in news articles I am referred to, not infrequently, as Francis X. Biddle. And you will find plenty of Irish in the Department of Justice. The name of Charles Fahy, the Solicitor General, speaks for itself; and the Assistant to the Attorney General, next in command, James Rowe, has the vigor and imagination that his Irish blood guarantees.

Today all of us wear a bit of shamrock in our hearts in memory of the good Saint who fifteen hundred years ago brought Ireland in touch with Western Europe, and particularly with the young religion of Christ that was flowering in Rome. The Irish had not yet discovered America; but it did not take them long to make themselves at home in the new land of freedom when they found how congenial to their spirit was this wide country of opportunity. For men who have lived under a tyranny that has taught them only to resist do not take long to flower and expand when a new environment draws them into its free heart.

And how the Irish loved freedom!

Do you remember Wendell Phillips' account of Daniel O'Connell's fight in the British Parliament for emancipation of Negro slaves in the West Indies? The West Indian block in Parliament, pledged to maintain slavery, had promised to throw their 27 votes to him on every Irish question if only he would oppose Negro emancipation. "It was," Phillips wrote, "a terrible temptation. How many a so-called statesman would have yielded!" O'Connell said, "Gentlemen, God knows I speak for the saddest nation the sun ever sees, but may my right hand forget its cunning and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if to

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serve Ireland, even Ireland, I forget the Negro one single hour!"

Always the Irish have cared about freedom, not only for themselves, but for others who were making the same fight. "I have seen a white crow and heard of black swans," said John Randolph of Roanoke, "but an Irish opponent of American liberty I have never either seen or heard of." And in the Civil War a slave holder lamented: "The mistake with us has been that it was not made a felony to bring in an Irishman when it was made piracy to bring in an African."

They would never forget that dream of nationhood and freedom to which O'Connell gave such strong substance; for, as T. C. Irwin said in "The Potato Digger's Song":

"As the great sun sets in glory furled,
Faith, it's grand to think, as I watch his face,
If he never sets on the English World,
He never, lad, sets on the Irish race."

And how they took to the land of the free! Between 1650 and 1659 sixty thousand emigrated from Ireland to the American Colonies, about half the estimated population for the latter year. In 1789, David Ramsay, the historian of South Carolina recorded that: "The colonies which now form the United States may be considered as Europe transplanted. Ireland, England, Scotland, France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Sweden, Poland, Italy furnished the original stock of the present population, and are generally supposed to have contributed to it in the order named. For the last 70 or 80 years no nation has contributed so much to the population of America as Ireland."

And small wonder, for the new country was a land of opportunity, as evidenced by a letter that James Murray, a resident of New York City, wrote on November 7, 1737, to his friend the Rev. Baptist Boyd, of County Tyrone, Ireland. "Reverend Baptist Boyd," it ran, "Read this Letter, and look, and

tell aw the poor Folk of your Place, that God has open'd a Door for their Deliverance; for here is no Scant of Bread, and if your Sons wad but come here, they wad get more Money teechin a Letin Skulle in ane Year nor ye yer sell wad get for three Years preechin whar ye are. Reverend Baptist Boyd, there came one with me in the Ship that now gets ane Hundred Punds for ane year for teechin a Letin Skulle, and God kens, little he is skilled in Learning, and yet they think him a high learned Man. Ye ken I had but sma Learning when I left ye, and now wad ye think it, I hea 20 Pund a Year for being a Clark to the York Meeting-House, and I keep a Skulle for wee Weans. . . . My Love to ye aw."

A "Description of the Territory (District) of Columbia," published in Paris in 1816, notes that one-half of the population of Washington were of Irish origin, many of whom had no acquaintance with the English language. A street sign was observed to read: "Peter Rodgers, saddler, from the green fields of tyranny to the green streets of Washington and liberty." The saddler was a native of Cork, who had been banished at the age of 75, for no other reason (as he alleged) than that of having worn a green colored coat and vented sighs for his dear native country. I wonder. . . .

But if the Irish left Ireland to come to America they were not minded to have the new country forget whence they had come; and today in the United States we have 24 Dublins, 21 Waterfords, 18 Belfasts, 16 Tyrones, 10 Limericks, 9 Antrims, 8 Sligos, 7 Derrys, 6 Corks, 5 Kildares. . . .

Fighters, dreamers, poets - they brought with them memories of that green Island of Druids and leprechauns; inconsistencies; an expansive, lyrical humor; and courage. The Celtic state of mind has been described as "a vehement reaction against the despotism of fact." They liked the form of humor commonly known

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as a "bull"; but the Irish bull, as an Irish writer has said, is always pregnant. An Irish alderman, speaking on the duty of patriotism at a forefathers dinner in Boston said: "Every man should love his native land - whether he was born there or not. He should be willing to die for it. People are dying today who never died before."

And they brought courage and the Irish love of battle, and the memory of their heroic ancestors who had died in battle after deeds of valor. Descendants of Catholic Irish who had settled in Maryland and Pennsylvania, and of Protestants from Ulster in New England, Virginia and the Carolinas joined the revolutionary army in 1775, and made up nearly a third of its personnel. Washington's Irish aides included Adjutant General Edward Hand, rifles; Brigadier General Stephen Moylan, dragoons; Major General Henry Knox, artillery; Colonel Ephraim Blaine, quartermaster; and John Dunlop, bodyguard.

In 1776 John Barry, first Commodore of the new United States Navy, was appointed to command the Lexington, which captured the tender Edward after a sharp action. The Lexington is today a glorious name in the great American navy. . . The first blow struck at the British on the water after war began was the capture of the British armed schooner Margaretta in Machais Bay, Maine, by the American Schooner Liberty, in command of Captain Jeremiah O'Brien, native of Cork. On orders of General Washington "St. Patrick" was made the watchword on the night before the evacuation of Boston by the British, 167 years ago tonight, March 17, 1776.

Nor is the Irish tradition forgotten in the Navy, as witness the fact that in 1863 the U.S. Navy Cruiser Shamrock was christened with a bottle of Irish whiskey.

Perhaps as typical an Irishman as any of his time was General John Sullivan, who began his stormy career in the Revolutionary War by rallying a

band of New Hampshire men to capture Fort William and Mary at the entrance of Portsmouth Harbor. He served at Boston, at Quebec, Long Island, Jersey, Staten Island, Germantown, Valley Forge, Brandywine, Newport. To quote from the Dictionary of American Biography: "He was brave, hot-headed, over sensitive, fond of display, generous to a fault, usually out of money, and a born political organizer."

A New Hampshire tradition has it that when Margery Browne, of Cork, was on her way to America, someone asked her what she planned to do when she reached the colonies. "Raise governors for them, to be sure," was her ready reply. She married John Sullivan, a schoolmaster, formerly of Limerick. Reminiscing in her old age, Margery Browne Sullivan used to say she had known what it was to work hard in the fields, "carrying in my arms the Governor of Massachusetts, with the Governor of New Hampshire tagging at my skirts." Her son John, the fighting general who was such a good political organizer, became Governor of New Hampshire in 1786; and his brother James, Governor of Massachusetts in 1807.

In the Civil War it was estimated that 40% of the Federals were Irish or of Irish descent. New York alone furnished over 51,000 Irishmen and 80,000 of Irish descent. General Philip H. Sheridan was born in Albany the year after his parents arrived from County Cavan. General Thomas Francis Meagher commanded the "Irish Brigade" at Fredericksburg; General Michael Corcoran, the Irish 69th Regiment; Major General Alexander McDowell McCook was at Shiloh and Corinth, Perryville, Stone River, Chickamauga.

Tonight, answering to the toast to our dear Country, tonight, as we remember the Irish, on this their Saint's Day, let us remember some of the

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heroes of this war, Americans, whose Irish ancestors must stir tonight in pride over their heroism as we now record it:

Captain Colin P. Kelly, Jr., who on December 9, 1941, near Cagayan, Philippine Islands, with his plane a focal point of fire from strong enemy forces, placed three direct hits on an enemy battleship; enroute to his home field was set afire by two enemy fighters; ordered his crew to bail out; last to leave the ship, from which six men were saved, was killed in the crash.

Corporal Philip N. Murphy, under direct fire from numerous enemy tanks at Lyautey, in North Africa, who went into action with an assault gun and routed six tanks out of the woods into the open, where the air forces and observers for naval gunfire could locate them - and did.

Sergeant John D. Sullivan, who participated in a daylight attack on an airdrome at Courtaix, in France; and, after his plane had bombed its target, was attacked by from 20 to 30 enemy fighters, and destroyed a Messerschmidt 109.

Lieutenant Commander Edward Henry O'Hare, of the Navy, who as section leader and pilot of fighting squadron 3 on February 20, 1942, having lost the assistance of his team mates, interposed his plane between his ship and an advancing enemy formation of nine attacking twin-engine heavy bombers. Attacking alone he shot down five enemy bombers and severely damaged a sixth before they reached the bomb release point.

Lieutenant Commander Robert B. Kelly, of the Navy, who was awarded the Army Distinguished Service Cross and the Silver Star and the Navy Cross with the following citation: For distinguished conduct in the line of his profession and for extraordinary courage in combat as commanding officer of the U.S.S. PT 34, when that vessel in company with the U.S.S. PT 41 made an attack on the Japanese light cruiser Kuma on the night of April 8-9, 1942. Despite extremely

heavy shell fire opposition and the fact that the cruiser was screened by four enemy destroyers, the PT 34 closed to three hundred yard range and made successful torpedo hits on the enemy cruiser, finally sinking her. Then, on the following morning, in a narrow channel of Cebu Harbor, with three guns of the PT 34 out of action and a hole six feet across blown through her, Commander Kelly maneuvering to save his boat from further direct hits from four attacking enemy dive bombers, maintained fire against the enemy until all of his remaining guns were out of action and with five of his crew of six killed or wounded, beached his boat, and, under continual strafing from the enemy, directed the removal of the wounded to a place of safety.

Rear Admiral Daniel Judson Callaghan, to whom the President, on December 9, 1942, awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously, presenting it to his son; Lieutenant (J.G.) Daniel J. Callaghan, Jr. "for extraordinary heroism and conspicuous intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty, during action against enemy Japanese forces during the battle of Guadalcanal on the night of November 12-13, 1942. Although out balanced in strength and numbers by a desperate and armed enemy, Rear Admiral Callaghan, with ingenious tactical skill and superb coordination of units under his command, lead his forces into battle against tremendous odds, thereby contributing decisively to the routing of a powerful invasion fleet and to the consequent frustration of a formidable Japanese offensive. While fighting during close range operations in the face of furious bombardment by superior enemy fire power, he was killed on the bridge of his flagship."

And then there were the five Sullivan brothers, all lost in a single action when the cruiser Juneau went down fighting last November in the battle of Guadalcanal. These boys, of a Waterloo, Iowa, family, had enlisted together,

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and had asked that they be allowed to serve together. And that is the way they did serve--to the last. For them the Navy has named a new destroyer-- the U.S.S. Sullivans.

It is good to recall these American heroes, of Irish descent, tonight, on March 17, 1943. And it is good to know that there are so many Americans who share, by an ancient heritage, the love of a clean fight as only an Irishman can love it, the abhorrence of oppression as only an Irishman can abhor it. But through this heritage, too, runs a loyalty to true friends and protectors, equally strong, equally constant. Today that loyalty transcends all that has gone before. We have seen the attempts of enemy propagandists in our country to revive ancient grudges. And one by one, we have seen them fail. In America they will always fail. Here nothing in the past can divide us or hold us back from this fight which aims to rid the world of a kind of vermin hated by the Irish as wholeheartedly as by any people on earth.