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## Fr Patrick Meany and the Dr Keating Society, 1860 – 1865

The history of Irish-language publication in the nineteenth century is marked by the varying successes of learned societies and religious bodies, and of enterprising individuals throughout the country. The latter is typified by the efforts of people such as Pádraig Denn, James Scurry, Thomas Swanton, Richard D’Alton and Conchubhar Mac Suibhne, while others such as Robert MacAdam, Philip Barron and John O’Daly were enabled, through personal resources and business acumen to operate on somewhat larger scales. Both organisations and individuals fed off the Irish manuscript tradition and off some of its remaining exponents, and, in their publications, largely reflected the continuity of emphasis, from script to print, on productions in the literary language.

One of the more enigmatic of the societies was the Dr Keating Society, founded in Co. Waterford in 1861. Though planned on an ambitious scale, and modelled in its organisation on the Ossianic Society, it was to prove a disappointment to those involved. Lack of editorial clarity and methodology was compounded by health problems that afflicted the prime mover of the Society, Fr Patrick Meany (1816–89). At the time of its foundation Fr Meany was a curate in the parish of Clonea (Power) and Rathgormack, Co. Waterford. The origins of the Society are revealed in a letter written from the priests’ residence at Ballyknock<sup>1</sup> by Fr Meany to William Smith O’Brien, 4 September 1860.

Some time since at a meeting of the ‘Ossianic Society’ you threw out a suggestion worthy of your own generous, patriotic heart, which did not fail to make an impression on me, & which I resolved to see realized [as] far as my own humble exertions could. It was a hint to the Bishops & others to form a kindred Society, with a view to rescue from distruction [*sic*] such works as the learned Dr. Keating’s ‘Eocar Sgíath an Aifrinn’, & such like treatises. It struck me with an irresistible force, as indeed do all the noble sentiments of Nationality & Patriotism which come from you, & with which I feel thoroughly identified.

I resolved to set to work, & organize such a Society as you sketched out. You’ll be glad to hear that I have succeeded to a great extent. A few priests were called together – a chairman appointed – a resolution passed declaring such a society created. I was requested to act as secretary pro. tem. with instructions to write to the Bishops of the Province for their sanction, & cooperation. I have had the most encouraging letters from nearly all.

I waited on the Arch Bishop at Thurles, & met with an enthusiastic reception, & promise of cooperation from him & his patriotic Clergy. He has accepted the Presidency of the Society, & the other Bishops cheerfully become V. Presidents. They have forwarded the names of their best Irish scholars among their Clergy to

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<sup>1</sup> Family home of Fr Timothy Dowley P.P., where the curates resided also; Pádraig Ó Macháin, ‘Cíos, cás agus cathú: teagasc an Athar de Bhál 4’, *An Linn Bhuí* 14 (2010) 151–71: 151, 158.

act as a Committee of management. I have written a Prospectus, & only wait its being approved of by Dr. Leahy to have it printed & published. You shall have the first one issued, as I candidly confess, to you is due the merit, & the thanks for this new society being formed. Hitherto I have kept the matter from the public till all our plans were matured, & our Prospectus struck out. But I owe it to you thus to put you in possession of what has been done up to this, & to sincerely thank you for the suggestion which led me to work up the matter to its last point before launching it before the public. Mr. O'Daly of Dublin is giving us valuable assistance. If I mistake not he gave you some account of our work. A difference of opinion arose as to whether we should give translations or not. I consulted several on the point & all agree that we should, otherwise to hundreds the printed text unfortunately would be as sealed a treasure as the works in M.S.S. This will of course cause delay, & create double expense. But it will induce nine out of every ten to study the text & to read the dear old tongue. Do you not agree in this view of the case? I'd like to have the opinion of one for whom I have the highest esteem as an Irishman a Patriot, & a Politician.

P.S. Please excuse this trouble. I feel I owe it to you thus much to write. As no monument has been raised to the learned Dr. Keating I have called our Society 'the Dr. Keating Society'. He was a Munster man, & one who suffered for his Country & Religion. He lies buried in an obscure [Church] yard in our Diocess, & it will be only a well merited tribute to his genius & learning thus at least to perpetuate his memory.<sup>2</sup>

### **Fr Patrick Meany**

Fr Meany belonged to a significant ecclesiastical family in the diocese of Waterford and Lismore. Three of his uncles – John, Denis and Patrick – were parish priests of Kilrossanty, Co. Waterford.<sup>3</sup> The most famous of these was Fr John Meany (c.1778–1819). He was renowned for his sermons in Irish<sup>4</sup> and for his mythic status as banisher of 'Petticoat Loose', the famous spirit of Béal Locha, on the Waterford-Tipperary border

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<sup>2</sup> NLI MS G 1244.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Power, *Waterford & Lismore: a compendious history of the united dioceses* (Cork 1937) 202. Fr Denis, then in Portlaw, was a subscriber for two copies of the 1802 edition of the *Pious Miscellany* by Tadhg Gaedhlach Ó Súilleabháin: Seamus Úa Casaíde, 'Some editions of O'Sullivan's Miscellany', *Journal of the Waterford and South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society* 14 (1911) 113–22: 116. A letter (26 May [1829]) from P[atrick] Meany (uncle), Kilrossanty, to Fr Patrick Wall (patron of Tomás Ó Icedha and P.P. Clonea-Rathgormack) is in RIA MS 1005 (23 H 17), p. 331; this Fr Patrick (died 26 October 1836) bequeathed £35 a year for three years to his nephew Patrick, then a student in St John's (Waterford and Lismore Diocesan Archive, RA/S 8.19).

<sup>4</sup> Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'Seanmóintí Déiseacha san *Irisleabhar*', *An Linn Bhuí* 10 (2006) 141–50.

near Clogheen.<sup>5</sup> Following his death he was immortalised in the well-known *caoineadh* attributed to Anna Ní Chadhla.<sup>6</sup> Fr John's brother, Pierce Meany of Kilineen, reputedly had learned the sermons of Bishop Gallagher by heart to the extent that he was in a position to anticipate the Sunday sermon in Clonea (Déiseach, R.C. parish of Abbeyside) for those too distant from the priest to hear.<sup>7</sup>

Through his marriage to Mary Redmond, Pierce Meany – who lived to the age of 102 – was father of seven children, four boys and three girls. Of these, three boys (Patrick, Joseph and Gerard) became priests, the fourth – Denis – became a medical doctor,<sup>8</sup> one of the girls joined the Presentation order of nuns in Lismore, and another was to be mother of Patrick O'Connor, Bishop of Armidale, Australia, and of David O'Connor, parish priest of Ballyduff and, later, Ballylooby, Diocese of Waterford and Lismore.

Fr Patrick Meany, born in 1816, was the eldest of the family. He attended the seminary of St John's College in Waterford city, 1834–9.<sup>9</sup> Here he came under the influence of the College's Irish teacher, Tomás Ó Ieadha, the renowned scribe and scholar, as also did his brother, Fr Gerard.<sup>10</sup> Fr Patrick's first assignment was Lismore, a large parish, which at the time incorporated the neighbouring village of Ballyduff, and which was ruled by the redoubtable Fr Patrick Fogarty P.P. from 1838 to 1866.<sup>11</sup>

Fogarty was a native Irish speaker, and was particularly noted for his public addresses in that language on two occasions: at Cloneen, Co. Tipperary, at the hanging of the Mahers in 1824 for the burning of the Sheas,<sup>12</sup> and at Dungarvan during the famine in 1846.<sup>13</sup> By conviction, and for reasons of local political prudence, he was an advocate of law and order. His curate, Fr Meany, was somewhat more radical. Charles Gavan Duffy, in a letter to Thomas Davis, reported witnessing him addressing a crowd in neighbouring Cappoquin in 1844:

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<sup>5</sup> Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'Petticoat Loose', *An Linn Bhuí* 5 (2001) 210–13.

<sup>6</sup> Breandán Ó Buachalla, 'Marbhchaoine an Athar Seán Ó Maonaigh', *Saoi na hÉigse: aistí in ómós do Sheán Ó Tuama* (Pádraigín Riggs et al. eds, Dublin 2000) 197–208.

<sup>7</sup> *Nation*, 4 January 1890 (letter to editor from John Fleming).

<sup>8</sup> For the remarkable Dr Denis Meany see Eddie Cantwell, *The way it was: Ballinacourty, Ballinroad and Clonea, the families and their history* (Dungarvan 2004) 104–11.

<sup>9</sup> Bursar's Register, Diocesan Archive, Diocese of Waterford and Lismore. Fr John Meany's manuscript, RIA MS 1017 (3 C 3), was in Fr Patrick's possession while in St John's in 1836. Another manuscript formerly owned by Fr Patrick Meany was UCD Additional Ir MS 3, a copy of 'Parthas an Anna' later given to Canon Patrick Power by Fr Meany's nephew, Fr David O'Connor of Ballyduff; cf. *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 14 (1905) 707; a copy of the same text by Labhrás Ó Fuartháin's was also in the possession of his uncle, Fr John (St John's College, Waterford, MS 28).

<sup>10</sup> Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'Litir Ghaelach, 1848', *Decies* 57 (2001) 85–9.

<sup>11</sup> Power, *Waterford & Lismore*, 219–20. See Robert Arthure, *A priest of his time: Patrick Fogarty (1791–1866)* (Cappoquin 1998).

<sup>12</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 24 August 1824.

<sup>13</sup> Arthure, *Patrick Fogarty*, 59–61.

At Cappoquin a vigorous young priest (Father Meany) addressed the people in Irish by the light of a bonfire, and I have seldom witnessed a scene fitter for an Irish Wilkie to paint.<sup>14</sup>

On this the Young Irishman, Michael Cavanagh of Cappoquin, observed:

Mr. Duffy here alluded to the Rev. Father Patrick Meany, then a curate in the neighboring parish of Lismore, physically and intellectually a splendid specimen of the Irish priesthood. His parish priest, Dr. Fogarty, being inimical to the national movement, the ardent young curate was debarred from giving expression to his patriotic aspirations within the bounds of his parish; and so, on all important occasions, he was found exhorting the more congenial spirits of Cappoquin – with whom he was a special favorite. His stirring speeches were invariably in Irish.<sup>15</sup>

His reception in Cappoquin contrasted with his ministry among the *petit bourgeoisie* of Lismore, where he was obliged to say masses in private houses, in one instance using a piano as an altar.<sup>16</sup>

Fr Meany continued the family tradition of sermonising in Irish: two collections of his sermons dating from his time in Lismore and Ballyduff survive.<sup>17</sup> His pastoral work and his political activities receive recognition in a *beochaoineadh* composed in his honour on the occasion of his transfer to the parish of St Mary's, Clonmel, in 1844. This song was modelled – deliberately, one presumes – on a similar one composed for his uncle, Fr John, on the occasion of his transfer from Lismore to Kilrossanty in 1808.<sup>18</sup> The song to Fr Patrick celebrates his work for the scapular and teetotal movements, as well as his political allegiance to O'Connell. It also refers to his work in having a convent built in Lismore for the Presentation nuns:<sup>19</sup>

Stad go fóill agus déin machnamh ar rian a láimhe sa mbaile  
is aosta seanda atá inár measc-na, 'sé Lios Mór na naomh,

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Gavan Duffy, *Young Ireland: a fragment of Irish history* I–II (final revision, London 1896) I, 105, (Duffy had mistakenly referred to 'Father Malley' in earlier editions).

<sup>15</sup> Michael Cavanagh, *Memoirs of Gen. Thomas Francis Meagher* (Worcester, Mass. 1892) 44.

<sup>16</sup> Neil J. Byrne, *Robert Dunne 1830–1917: Archbishop of Brisbane* (St Lucia 1991) 7.

<sup>17</sup> NLI MS G 1125 and St Patrick's College Maynooth MS B 21; the latter contains sermons in English on the commandments, and sermons in Irish on the sacraments, and is inscribed 'Padraig Ó Máonadh sagart' (p. [i]). Another manuscript in Fr Patrick Meany's possession while in Lismore is what is now RIA MS 1378 (23 O 69), a manuscript previously owned by his uncle, Fr John, containing a copy of *Scáthán Shacramuinte na hAithridhe* by the eighteenth-century north-Cork scribe Seaghán Ó Conuill.

<sup>18</sup> Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'Sagairt an Leasa', *An Linn Bhuí* 3 (1999) 72–81.

<sup>19</sup> See Power, *Waterford & Lismore*, 223.

is ann do chífir *convent* do *nuns* atá faoi mhairg  
atá 'tabhairt scoil is teagasc do fhíorbhochaibh Dé.

Of his activities in Lismore it was said: 'Rev. P. Meany had tact, executive skill, special aptitude for supervision, and indomitable perseverance. This poor priest obtained from the Duke of Devonshire the use of slate and limestone quarries, horses and carts from the farmers round, and many local contributions'.<sup>20</sup> His fundraising and organisational talents continued in Clonmel, where he is credited with raising the funds for the building of the Church of the Assumption.<sup>21</sup>

During his time in Clonmel, Fr Meany came into particular focus during 1848. At a huge Repeal meeting held in the town on St Patrick's Day of that year, he stirred up the crowd in a speech proposing a motion that the Government provide food and employment for those people affected by the Famine:

You see your fathers and mothers, your wives, brothers and sisters sinking and dying before their years from starvation and famine, and you continue loyal and peaceable, – well continue so. But things cannot hold as they are, keep your eyes, and your ears too, open and bide your time. . . And what did England give us of herself? Nothing – whatever we have received it was not for love of us. As they say in Irish, which I believe you'll understand, *is ma an earra an eagla*.<sup>22</sup>

A fortnight later he was called upon to speak again in Clonmel, at a Trades Meeting held in support of the Young Irelanders. While he could not agree with John Mitchel he held him in admiration, and praised the workers (operatives) of Clonmel for their unity:

The Protestants and Catholics are brothers here as they should be throughout the land. And why should it not be so – we seek no ascendancy, but will struggle hand and hand to shake off the oppressive yoke of despotism and make our country free. To this the Catholic's word has been promised, and the Protestant operative knows the truth of that word. For my part I would clasp the hand of the blackest Orangeman from the North – the moment he pledged himself to be true to Ireland.<sup>23</sup>

He later wrote to the local newspaper saying that 'our object and undying resolve is to get rid of this alien government lock, stock, and barrel, and have our affairs regulated by Irishmen, acknowledging no other power save the Queen, Lords and Commons of Ireland to enact laws for this country.'<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Patrick Power, *Parochial history of Waterford and Lismore during the 18th and 19th centuries* (Waterford 1912) 159.

<sup>21</sup> Power, *Waterford & Lismore*, 144; William P. Burke, *History of Clonmel* (Waterford 1907) 281.

<sup>22</sup> *Tipperary Free Press*, 22 March 1848.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 April 1848.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 April 1848.

Following Mitchel's transportation, a Confederate Club – the John Mitchel Club – was formed in Clonmel in June 1848.<sup>25</sup> Fr Meany wrote immediately (11 June) seeking to enrol:

The time has arrived when every Irishman who feels the wrongs and miseries inflicted on his country, and sincerely desires her freedom and independence, should take such a step as this to redress the one and work out the other. Besides, the disreputable conduct of this 'Jury packing Whig Government' must arouse the most apathetic, and put them in an attitude to defend their liberties against the unconstitutional conduct of our foreign rulers. Henceforth there is no going back, and the man who formerly vowed and promised should be prepared to fulfil that resolve.<sup>26</sup>

On 25 June he addressed a meeting of the Club:

The time has fully arrived when every man who desires the independence and prosperity of this country, must do something more than wishing well to the cause – must work and cooperate, as far as in him lies, by zeal and action, to promote and achieve the freedom of this his native land.<sup>27</sup>

Although the John Mitchel Club was short-lived,<sup>28</sup> Fr Meany was to retain his interest in events during the State Trials in Clonmel in the autumn, being among those deputed to collect signatures to the Clonmel petition for mercy for O'Brien.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Dr Keating Society**

While still in Clonmel, Fr Meany joined the Celtic Society in 1847.<sup>30</sup> This society was founded in Dublin in 1845 by John O'Daly and others for the purpose of publishing literature in Irish. Also joining in 1847 was one of Fr Meany's two future collaborators, John Fleming (1814–96),<sup>31</sup> a former hedge-school master who was now a teacher in the National School in Clonea (Power), Co. Waterford, his native parish.

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<sup>25</sup> William Nolan, 'The Irish Confederation in County Tipperary in 1848', *Tipperary Historical Journal* 1998, 2–18: 7.

<sup>26</sup> *Tipperary Free Press*, 14 June 1848.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 June 1848.

<sup>28</sup> Following the Government proclamation of the Confederate Clubs, 26 July, the John Mitchel Club dissolved itself the next day (*Tipperary Free Press*, 29 July 1848).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 October 1848; the petition for St Mary's, Clonmel, signed by Fr Meany, survives as NAI CRF 1848 0 16/2/133.

<sup>30</sup> *Miscellany of the Celtic Society* (Dublin 1849) ix; NLI MS 1418, p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> *Miscellany of the Celtic Society*, viii; UCD Ó Lochlainn MS 1 (Celtic Society Letter-Book), No. 28; NLI MS 1418, p. 9.

John O'Daly founded his second learned society – the Ossianic Society – in 1853, and Fr Meany duly became a member in 1856, with Fleming joining a year later. Also joining the Ossianic Society with Fr Meany was his second collaborator, William Williams (1820–75) of Dungarvan.<sup>32</sup> Both Meany and Williams were already members of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society, Meany elected in 1854 and Williams in 1856.<sup>33</sup> For a very short period, these were the organisations in the company of which the Keating Society would be mentioned as publishers of Irish language material,<sup>34</sup> and Fr Meany, together with such luminaries as Petrie, Todd, and Reeves, would be numbered among the 'evangels of the gospel of Celtic Literature and History'.<sup>35</sup>

By the time Fr Meany was transferred to the parish of Rathgormack and Clonea in 1858, having spent a year in Clashmore following his transfer from Clonmel, he had already established a reputation as a man of action in parochial and political matters, as well as interesting himself in the Irish antiquarian societies of the day. He was, therefore, well positioned to take up the suggestion that had been made by William Smith O'Brien at the Ossianic Society meeting of 1860.

O'Brien replied to Fr Meany's letter, which reply Meany forwarded to Archbishop John McHale. Fr Meany then sent a second letter to O'Brien, 9 September 1860. He referred again to the progress being made and to the help that he was getting from all over Munster:

Many thanks for your more than kind letter – one in keeping with your truly Irish heart. The Suggestions shall be acted upon by me, & as you will see by our Prospectus have been nearly anticipated.

I'd have written to Dr. McHale before this, but that I knew he was particularly occupied till after this day. I shall write to him, & enclose your invaluable letter & am sure to receive a hearty cooperation. The Professors of Maynooth shall be also solicited for their aid in the good work.

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<sup>32</sup> Standish Hayes O'Grady, *Toruigheacht Dhiarmuda agus Ghrainne* Transactions of the Ossianic Society III (Dublin 1857) 320, 323; John O'Daly, *Laoithe Fiannuigheachta or Fenian lays* Transactions of the Ossianic Society IV (Dublin 1859) 313. Williams was a talented artist with a deep interest in *ogham*. In addition to the references to him in Máire Ní Mhurchú and Diarmuid Breathnach, *1782–1881 Beathaisnéis* (Baile Átha Cliath 1999) 162–3, other published accounts of him are: Pádraig Ó Dálaigh, 'Uilliam Mac Uilliam', *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 13/152 (1903) 311–12 and S[eán] Ó F[loinn], 'Dungarvan Keating Society', *Dungarvan Observer*, 22 August 1931.

<sup>33</sup> *Proceedings and Transactions of the Kilkenny and the South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society* 3 (1854–5) 174, 4 (1856–7) 189.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. J. Eugene O Cavanagh, 'Dutch and other languages: the Irish language', *Notes and Queries* 3rd Series, 11 (February 1867) 119.

<sup>35</sup> *Irishman*, 29 August 1863.



Our Prospectus suggests the Publication of the Lives of the Irish Saints as you mention, & among the others those contained in a valuable MSS. [*sic*] the 'Book of Lismore' about 500 years old. This has the lives of St. Declan Patron of Ardmore, & of St. Carthage of Lismore. I have written to his Grace the Duke of Devonshire for permission to allow access to it as one of the Society's future publications guarranteeing [*sic*] any order he may make for its safety.

When our Prospectus is out you will do the Society a great good by addressing a public letter on the subject in Substance such as you did me the great honour of writing – for I believe it will have the effect of inspiring many Clerical, & Lay persons to join our ranks & [there is] no man in Ireland whose influence is so appreciated as yours from the uniform disinter[e]stedness of your Patriotic aims, & the unselfishness of your loving heart for all that tends for the exaltation & independence of our Common Country. As to the miracles attributed to our Irish saints no man is called upon to make an act of faith in them. But as they may tend to illustrate the topography & shed some light on the condition of our Country they may be received by men like yourself (alas that such are so few) with a welcome.

Since I last wrote to you I have the most earnest & encouraging promises of cooperation from the other Bishops of Munster. I now have the Arch Bishop & his Clergy – the Bishop of Cork – Waterford – Ross, Kerry, Cloyne & Killaloe, each & all most enthusiastic in the undertaking & promising every aid from their Clergy. I have no doubt but before six months I will have 1000 on our list – & by this muster will be enabled to allow a remuneration to translators. If our first intended publication were taken in hands I would undertake to [pay] them in advance of the future vols. I would undertake to translate the second – the 'Trí bior-ghaoithe an bhais' an excellent copy of which I have.<sup>36</sup> Mr. Williams of Dungarvan promised to translate another & few men better capable of doing so. If we were once under way I have no doubt of our ultimate success.

You'll be glad of this piece of information – that in our National Schools here, both Male & female, I have formed Classes of Irish. They can not only read anything I write for them on the black board but the Irish songs cut out of the Nation & Irishman, & those from O'Daly's Munster Poets are hung up around the Schools & they sing in unison the most thorough out & out songs with real spirit & gusto. We are fortunate in having a Master, a first class Irish Scholar to carry out this National System. I give them Irish books for premiums as a Stimulus. I first thought to ask the permission of the Board & thus test them – but then until [they] or the Inspector took any notice of the insurrection I let matters progress.

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<sup>36</sup> Now UCC MS 31, written for Fr Patrick Meany by Tomás Ó Iceadha at Ardfinnan in 1855. This manuscript contains multiple markings throughout, suggesting that it had been read very closely by Fr Meany, either with a view to making an edition, or to help in the process of editing the *Eochairsgiath*. NLI MS G 329, pp. 95–135, contains a portion of the *Eochairsgiath* written by Ó Iceadha in 1856 and addressed to 'a Athair dhil, Pádraig'.

I entirely agree with you with regard to the republication of Keating's History. It will come of our Society by & by.<sup>37</sup>

Fr Meany's two collaborators are here mentioned together for the first time: Williams, who is to translate some unspecified work, and Fleming – not referred to by name – the 'first class Irish Scholar' who was now a parishoner of Fr Meany's. Fleming had moved the short distance from Clonea to Rathgormack National School in 1849, where he was to remain as teacher for the next thirty-one years. The glimpse of the use of cuttings from the *Nation* and the *Irishman*, and from *Poets and poetry of Munster*, is remarkable: these extra-curricular Irish classes continued long after the Keating Society had ceased to be, indeed right up to the time of Fleming's retirement from teaching in December 1880.<sup>38</sup> It is to be inferred from Fr Meany's letter that Fleming had not yet become involved with the Keating Society.

The involvement of another Co. Waterford man, John O'Daly of Sliabh gCua, is signalled in Fr Meany's first letter.<sup>39</sup> By this time O'Daly was well established in Dublin, both in the book trade and in antiquarian circles. Since O'Daly was the prime mover behind the Celtic and Ossianic Societies, his help would have appeared invaluable to Meany. It is interesting to note, however, the 'difference of opinion' alluded to in the matter of the provision of translations for the proposed publications. Whether or not that difference arose between O'Daly and Fr Meany is not clear – O'Daly knew well the commercial value of English translations accompanying Irish texts – but in retrospect we may note that, at this early stage in the existence of the Keating Society, any differences of opinion did not bode well for its future.

In the earlier of his two letters to O'Brien, 4 September 1860, Fr Meany mentioned that he had written the Society's Prospectus, and was only awaiting the imprimatur of Dr Leahy, Archbishop of Cashel, before publishing it. The Prospectus did not appear in print until the following April. Fr Meany was working on the composition of the Society right up to the eve of this publication: he wrote to the well-known Cork antiquarian, John Windele, 14 April 1861, inviting him to join the Society's committee, and Windele's name duly appeared on the Prospectus when it was published nine days later.<sup>40</sup>

According to the Prospectus (given in full in the Appendix below), the Dr Keating Society was a nationalist organisation, the aim of which was the publication of hitherto unpublished religious texts in Irish, with a view to making them available to all interested in preserving the language. This was to be coupled with a moral element: the imparting of solid and useful instruction. The Prospectus also expressed the intention of the Society to

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<sup>37</sup> NLI MS G 1244.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *The Gaelic Union report, &c. for 1880* (Dublin 1881) 31.

<sup>39</sup> For O'Daly see Pádraig de Brún, *Scriptural instruction in the vernacular: the Irish Society and its teachers* (Dublin 2009) 203–209; and Proinsias Ó Drisceoil, *Seán Ó Dálaigh: éigse agus iomarbhá* (Corcaigh 2007).

<sup>40</sup> RIA MS 4 B 21/37 (Windele Correspondence).

publish elementary works of instruction in the Irish language. Such an intention was an advance on existing societies in that it recognised that there existed a potential audience of interested people whose knowledge of the language was such that they would require tuition in it before proceeding to read the Society's publications. In coupling language publication and language instruction, Fr Patrick Meany was echoing the pioneering work of Philip Barron some 30 years earlier. It may be noted that Fr Meany's Irish professor at St John's, Tomás Ó Iceadha, had been involved in Barron's project at Seafield, Co. Waterford,<sup>41</sup> and that one of the publications that emanated from this project had been that of an Irish sermon by Fr Patrick's uncle, Fr John Meany.<sup>42</sup> Thus a certain continuity existed between that last language movement in Co. Waterford and the one now being launched by Fr Patrick Meany, a continuity that received explicit expression in the Preface to the Society's Catechism, discussed below, where Bishop Abraham's letter of approval to Barron is quoted by William Williams.

It is possible that the membership figure of 500, projected in the Prospectus, would have raised eyebrows at the time. Cumulative membership figures, over many years, for the national societies which preceded and which were contemporary with Fr Meany's, show the Archaeological Society with a membership of 518, the Celtic Society with a membership of 428, and the Ossianic Society – to some extent the parent organisation of the Keating Society – with a membership of 716.<sup>43</sup> In comparison with those figures, Fr Meany's aim of an initial membership of 500 appears ambitious.

Fr Meany followed established practice in linking the annual subscription to the publication by the Society of a yearly volume. This subscription was to be six shillings, and the volume was to consist of about 400 pages of text and translation, bound in cloth. Again, we may remark that the subscription was one shilling higher than the subscription to the Ossianic Society, but cheaper than the 10s minimum of the Celtic Society; it bore no comparison, of course, to the initial £4 and annual £1 thereafter payable to the Archaeological Society by the gentlemen and noblemen whose membership it canvassed. The publications of the Keating Society were contingent, however, on the advance subscription of 500 names.

Because of its relatively specialised subject matter it is only to be expected that the Society should reflect that specialisation in its organisational structure. The President was the Archbishop of Cashel, and the Vice-Presidents the Catholic Bishops of the rest of the province. There was then a Committee of Management, which, inclusive of Treasurer and Secretary, numbered 37. Of this committee, 34 were Catholic curates or parish priests, distributed by counties as follows: 17 from Cork, 9 from Tipperary, 4 from Co. Waterford, 3 from Clare, and one from Kerry. The only laymen on the committee were

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<sup>41</sup> Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'Filíocht Athairneach I', *An Linn Bhúí* 7 (2003) 152–64. Barron recognised the need for 'little simple elementary Irish books ... to unlock the ponderous volumes of ancient Ireland': prospectus in *Ancient Ireland* 1 (January 1835).

<sup>42</sup> *Irish sermons with translations* (Dublin 1835).

<sup>43</sup> Figures from Damien Murray, *Romanticism, nationalism and Irish antiquarian societies, 1840–80* (Maynooth 2000) 63, 68, 75.

John Windele, William Williams, and the Treasurer, James O'Connor of the National Bank in Carrick-on-Suir. The Honorary Secretary was Fr Patrick Meany.

Like the learned societies on which it was modelled, the Dr Keating Society was to be devoted primarily to the publishing of manuscript materials in Irish, the stated intention of producing elementary tuition books following on from such publications as Barron's primers, or O'Daly's *Féin-theagasg Gaoidheilge*. Apart from the proposed membership of 500, which was presented not as an ambition but as a pre-requisite, another aspect of the Prospectus which might appear to have been detached from reality was the 37-member Committee of Management, which for a publication society would have been far too unwieldy and virtually impossible to co-ordinate. We know from Fr Meany's earlier letter that some preliminary meeting had taken place in 1860. It is unlikely, however, that this 37-member committee was ever intended to meet, and that its only real function was to help to enlist the 500 members which were estimated by Fr Meany as being necessary to finance the Society's annual publication. This might explain why so few Waterford priests are mentioned in the Prospectus: Fr Meany probably considered himself well capable of looking after subscriptions in his own diocese. As it turned out, irrespective of the large Committee of Management, to quote Canon Power, 'it would be true to say that [Meany, Williams and Fleming] were the Society'.<sup>44</sup>

In hindsight, therefore, there were present in the Society, even from its inception, some signs that did not encourage confidence in its future wellbeing. In contrast to the fanfare of the Prospectus, the principals of the Keating Society were to discover the harsh reality of trying to meet the over-ambitious objectives laid out in their manifesto. As their first objective they had set themselves the publication of an edition of Geoffrey Keating's long prose-text *Eochairsgiath an Aifrinn*. The Prospectus announced that an Irish scholar from among the laity had already begun work on this text. Two years later, however, the edition still had not appeared, and the target of a yearly volume from the Society had therefore not been met. One can infer that it was in response to an expression of disquiet on this point by John Windele that William Williams replied as follows to him, 23 June 1863:

It is not surprising that you had begun to despair of the K[eating] Society, a body which has hitherto done so very little to prove that it even lives. Doctor Keating's work on the Mass having been selected as the first to be printed, honest John O'Daly volunteered to prepare the text; and his offer having been gladly accepted, he set to work in due time. I took the liberty of recommending to him to collect as many copies as possible of the text, and mentioned that I had myself a fine old MS., which he could have the use of. He never called for it, however, contenting himself with a MS, which belonged to the Convent of Armagh in 1689,<sup>45</sup> and a

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<sup>44</sup> Patrick Power, 'The Gaelic Union: a nonagenarian retrospect', *Studies* 38 (1949) 413–18: 414.

<sup>45</sup> A slip for 1698. This is now RIA MS 127 (24 L 17), acquired as part of John O'Daly's collection, bearing 'Ex. Libris Conventus Armacani licen.' on f. 1r. This manuscript was

modern one, belonging to the bishop of this diocese.<sup>46</sup> After sundry delays and interruptions, he finished the transcript which was then given to Nicholas O’Kearney for translation, and both documents were forwarded in due time to the Hon. Sec. the Rev. Mr. Meany, and your humble servant, for revision. The text was one of the most wretched productions I have ever seen; the very title of the work, ‘Eochair Sgiath an Aifrinn’, was corrupted into Eochair-sgiatha an Aifrinn, (whatever that may mean) and translated ‘Key-shield of the Mass’. In returning the MSS. I sent a full set of title pages, and some short notes, explaining the title, and the term díonbhrollach, by which the preface is designated. After a careful examination of the MSS., we came to the conclusion, that, for the Society to publish O’Daly’s text, would be nothing short of suicide; and that a full and accurate copy should be made out. O’Kearney was accordingly set [to] work, and has already made such progress, as that he is confident, with his present start, to be able to feed the press. The translation requires emendation, but does not require to be re-written. O’Daly has repeatedly enquired why the work is not put to press and is becoming furious at the delay: the Hon. Sec. incautiously mentioned to him that the MSS. were in my hands, and suspecting me of having damned them, he has taken to abusing me in his own coarse style.<sup>47</sup>

From this eye-witness account, it is clear that the work on the edition of *Eochairsgiath an Aifrinn* was not prospering. The Dr Keating Society was in danger of falling at the first fence.

### **Eochairsgiath an Aifrinn**

In print many years later, John Fleming recalled his involvement with Williams and Fr Meany in the Keating Society:

With Mr. Williams, though we lived 14 Irish miles apart, I corresponded two or three times a week for a number of years. Father Daniel O’Sullivan being dead at the time, he was, beyond all comparison, the best Irish scholar in the south of Ireland. And he was equally good as a man, a Christian and a patriot. The other worker with us, Father Patrick Meany, the Founder of the Keating Society, has only recently gone to his reward. A good Irish scholar, a high-class Irish preacher; a better man than he there was not in Ireland; in fact the business of his life was to do good; and however he acquired the influence, he could do good in Australia, in America, in Canada – everywhere. Unfortunately a shadow crossed his mind, and after this, the two laymen became useless. Even Keating’s ‘Key to the Shields of

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also used by Fr Patrick Dinneen in his unpublished edition of *Eochairsgiath an Aifrinn* (NLI MS G 821).

<sup>46</sup> ‘The Bishop’s old MS. was made by John O Connell of Kildorrery in the year 1767’ (Fleming to Williams, 3 August 1865, RIA 23 A 58). This identifies the manuscript in question as St John’s College, Waterford, MS 20. The text of this manuscript has been extensively underlined, mainly in blue pencil, by John Fleming (cf. MS p. 39).

<sup>47</sup> RIA MS 4 B 23/55(i).

the Mass,' which Mr. Williams had translated, is, with the original, still lying as he left them, at his brother's house, though they were then ready for the press. What labour we had to bestow on a number of bad copies of this work, trying to make a good copy out of them, it would be too long to describe here.<sup>48</sup>

John O'Daly had worked throughout 1861 on his edition of the *Eochairsgiath*. In August he wrote to John Windele, telling him: 'I am very feeble from all the work I have done lately – I am at the Eochairsgiath for Father Meany (the best hearted man living)'.<sup>49</sup> In tandem with this work, and his day-job as bookseller in Anglesea Street, Dublin, O'Daly was also preparing the next volume of the Ossianic Society's *Transactions*, and when this volume appeared in November, he did not omit to mention the newly-founded society, in the course of referring to a manuscript source for *fianai gheacht* poems then in the possession of Fr Meany:

They are chiefly taken from a large manuscript collection made by Laurence Foran, of Portlaw, county of Waterford, in 1780, which is now in the hands of the Rev. Patrick Meany, C.C. of Ballyknock, Carrick-on-Suir, Honorary Secretary to the 'Keating Society,' lately organized, and which, we expect, will rescue many a gem that would otherwise perish, and preserve a large quantity of material, which does not come within the sphere of our other existing Societies.<sup>50</sup>

John Fleming recalled, in a passage quoted below, that his involvement with the Keating Society, and indeed his active involvement in Irish studies, began in June 1862, over a year after the Society had been founded. O'Daly had continued his work on the edition that year, and informed Windele in December that he had forwarded the work to the Society.<sup>51</sup> In fact, they had received the edition at least a month previously, as towards the end of November John Fleming had completed a preliminary collation of the text with that in a manuscript by Fr Meany's sometime tutor, Tomás Ó Icedha.<sup>52</sup> Fleming gave the results of this comparison to Fr Meany with a covering letter dated 24 November 1862, asking him to contact Williams for directions as to how he (Fleming) and Meany

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<sup>48</sup> *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 4/34 (1890) 31.

<sup>49</sup> RIA MS 4 B 21/71(i).

<sup>50</sup> John O'Daly (ed.), *Laoithe Fiannuigheachta or Fenian poems, second series* Transactions of the Ossianic Society VI (Dublin 1861) xv. The manuscript in question is now University College Cork, Irish MS 96, and was also used in O'Daly's first series of *Laoithe* (Transactions IV (1956) xxxi).

<sup>51</sup> RIA MS 4 B 22/93; this letter also mentions that 'Father Meany is not well at present', and there is further mention by O'Daly of Fr Meany's illness in a letter of 2 January 1863 (RIA MS 4 B 23/3(ii)).

<sup>52</sup> Said by Fleming to have been written in 1839 (Fleming to Williams, 3 August 1865, RIA MS 23 A 58), and therefore identifiable as St John's College, Waterford, MS 31; this manuscript bears markings similar to but not as extensive as those in St John's MS 20, and some lines from the text are repeated in Fleming's hand inside the back cover. In late 1863 (RIA MS 4 B 23/89 (i–ii)) Fr Meany obtained a loan of another manuscript of the text, one owned by John Windele: possibly that which is now RIA MS 598 (24 C 16).

might proceed with the work: ‘to let us know what more we should do; or could we in thus going over the manuscripts do things more methodically’.<sup>53</sup> Williams, clearly, was co-ordinating the work on O’Daly’s manuscript, prior to the decision being taken to abandon O’Daly altogether and to opt for an edition from Nicholas O’Kearney, whose role to date had been confined to translating O’Daly’s work, for which he received the sum of £4 from O’Daly, 10 December 1862.<sup>54</sup>

The O’Daly manuscript, and the accompanying O’Kearney translation, with comments by Fleming, Williams and Meany, referred to by Fleming (quoted above) as being in the possession of Williams’s brother, were subsequently acquired by Canon Patrick Power. They survive today as MS 93 in Canon Power’s collection of manuscripts in the library of University College Cork.<sup>55</sup> The manuscript bears the publication date of 1863 on its title-page, the printer selected to execute the work being John Fowler of Crow Street, Dublin, printer to the Catholic University (see below).

Comparison of MS 93 and RIA 127 (the ‘Armagh manuscript’, n. 45 above) confirms that the latter was the basis for O’Daly’s edition.<sup>56</sup> Bishop Dominic O’Brien’s manuscript, St John’s MS 20, which had been supplied by Fr Meany, was used by O’Daly to supply text where a chasm occurred in the RIA manuscript, where Chapter 12 of the *Eochairsgiath* was missing (MS 93, ff.150–61); otherwise it was used only occasionally. O’Daly’s edition consisted of expanding all manuscript contractions and abbreviations; supplying length-marks, punctuation, word and paragraph separation, additional to what already existed in his source; and capitalisation of proper nouns. As was common practice at the time, the hyphen was employed in representing initial eclipsis.<sup>57</sup>

John O’Daly was as much a part of native scribal tradition as he was of the print scholarship of the time. As was only to be expected, his edition was not free from error, particularly in the matter of the expansion of contractions.<sup>58</sup> There was nothing in his manuscript, however, that might not have been rectified at proof stage, and the edition, had it been published, would probably have enjoyed the same status as any of the Ossianic Society’s editions.

In comparing O’Daly’s text with a manuscript on which it had not been based – St John’s MS 31 – however, the Keating Society made a fatal error. Any judgement they might make on the quality of O’Daly’s edition, based on such a comparison, could have no

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<sup>53</sup> Letter and collation in RIA MS 23 A 58.

<sup>54</sup> Receipt in RIA MS 23 A 58.

<sup>55</sup> Canon Power, in his description of the manuscript, wrongly asserts that John O’Donovan was involved in the project, possibly confusing him with John O’Daly (*Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 14 (1904–5) 648).

<sup>56</sup> Sample used for comparison: UCC MS 93, ff. 76r–85r6 and RIA MS 127, ff. 26r3–30r9.

<sup>57</sup> E.g. MS cc- > g-c, tt- > d-t, etc.

<sup>58</sup> E.g. *sgiursadh* > *sgiúrsáil*; *dfhiachaibh* > *d’fhiachaidh*; *ar a ghuallaibh* > *ar a ghualainn*. In the sample analysed, one instance of the common scribal error of homoioteleuton occurs (MS 93, f. 80r11–12).

validity. Meany, Fleming and Williams had no previous editorial experience that might have prepared them for the work involved on the long prose text of the *Eochairsgiath*. From the initial error of not procuring O'Daly's base manuscript in order to check his edition, their inexperience led them onwards into a morass of editorial bewilderment from which they could not extract themselves.

Part of the manuscript of the subsequent O'Kearney edition also survives. It is one of five manuscripts originally belonging to Williams, which eventually found their way to the National Library of Ireland in 1954,<sup>59</sup> where the manuscript in question is designated G 708. This can be identified as 'the original' alluded to in Fleming's statement above. In view of the fact that Williams later undertook an adaptation of O'Kearney's translation (see below), it may be significant that in G 708 O'Kearney's name is deleted at the point where his authorship of the translation was to be acknowledged.<sup>60</sup> The date of printing is there given as 1864. Also in this collection of Williams's manuscripts is another manuscript of the *Eochairsgiath*, G 707, in the hand of Seaghán Ó Conuill (see notes 17 and 46 above), which is the 'fine old MS' referred to in Williams's letter to Windele.

The exemplar for O'Kearney's edition is as yet unidentified, and it is therefore not possible to form an opinion of its accuracy. It is clear, however, from the host of interlinear markings, corrections and insertions that were made by Williams on G 708, that this edition did not meet with the Society's approval either. Analysis of these corrections shows that, in many instances, Williams was comparing O'Kearney's text with that of his own manuscript (G 707) and with Bishop O'Brien's manuscript (St John's MS 20), both written by Seaghán Ó Conuill and on neither of which the edition had been based. More substantial intrusions take the form of pieces of paper pasted onto O'Kearney's text (e.g., ff. 43, 47, 72, 106), while in two instances (ff. 51 and 59, now misbound) whole pages have been inserted containing additional text in the hand of John Fleming.

In addition to having access to a number of other manuscript copies, the Society now had two versions of the text that had been prepared for the press, neither of which was to their liking. And so, from late 1864 and throughout 1865, Fleming, Meany and Williams toiled at their own version of the text and translation, based on the manuscripts and transcripts that they had to hand. From Chapter 17 to the end of the text of this edition (in Fleming's hand) and translation (in Williams's hand) survives today and is bound in with UCC MS 93, together with a draft translation of the Preface by Williams, and notes by Fr Meany

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<sup>59</sup> Pádraig Ó Macháin and Nessa Ní Shéaghda, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland* Fasc. 13 (Dublin 1996) 24–31. A list of Williams's manuscripts is in NLI MS G 554, ff. 1–17.

<sup>60</sup> In later life Fleming expressed, in another context, his opinion of 'the corrupting taint of the transcriber, Nicholas O Kearney' (RIA MS 769 (23 E 12) inside front cover). In correspondence with Williams (in RIA MS 23 A 58) Fleming refers to O'Kearney as 'the Prophet', an allusion to the latter's discredited 1856 publication, *The prophecies of SS. Columkille*. For an account of O'Kearney, see Seán Ó Dufaigh and Diarmaid Ó Doibhlin, *Nioclás Ó Cearnaigh: beatha agus saothar* (Dublin 1989).



on citations in the work. The various postmarks on this part of MS 93, dating from late 1864 to 1865, and originating either in Dungarvan or Carrick-on-Suir (the latter the post-town for Fleming and Meany), illustrate the degree of contact between the men at this time.

A series of letters of 1865 from Fleming to Williams, contained in RIA MS 23 A 58, further reveals the extent to which they were now involved in the minutiae of editorial work.<sup>61</sup> The problems of such work were exacerbated by the rural location of the editors, far from any library or interaction with fellow scholars. Contact with the printer, Fowler, was maintained by Fr Meany on trips to Dublin, while Fleming and Williams, living over 10 miles apart, the former in Clonea (Power) the latter in Dungarvan, teased out editorial niceties in correspondence with each other.

Fleming's own reference works were Fr Francis O'Molloy's *Grammatica Latino-Hibernica*, Edward O'Reilly's *Irish-English dictionary*, and John O'Donovan's *Grammar of the Irish language*, but such works could not obviate even the most elementary editorial agonising, at least on Fleming's part:

*Sacraimint* is the great stumbling block. To confess the truth it has partly paralysed my exertions these past weeks. Some time since you wrote, saying that we should most likely use it in the feminine, and so I went on – but some of the expressions appeared to me so strange that I did not know what to make of them: *di* and so on applied to the Eucharist overcame me.<sup>62</sup>

So too with matters of punctuation and orthography:

In transcribing the last portion of the *Eochair* you forgot that we had agreed to omit inverted commas. Write to me as soon as you can and say shall I erase them when looking through that portion – if not you will be at the necessity of restoring them in the other portions for uniformity's sake. Also say whether you will write *d'á* or *dá*; *nách* or *nach*. Surely our Irish works are not very uniform in any one respect, but that is no reason why we should not be so.<sup>63</sup>

Further frustration was encountered in the task of identifying citations in Keating:

When the quotation can at all be found, it is pleasant work – but when you fail, you are thrown on a desert without compass, turning hither and thither until headache at last compels you to leave off.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Formerly in the possession of Fr Piaras de Hindeberg S.J., it was donated to the RIA Library by Dr Diarmaid Ó hAirt.

<sup>62</sup> RIA MS 23 A 58, letter dated 24 April 1865.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, letter dated 5 September 1865.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Saturday morning' (letter otherwise undated).

They considered the idea of including John O'Mahony's introduction to his translation of Keating's *Forus Feasa ar Éirinn*,<sup>65</sup> but Fleming rejected the idea, partly because of the Church's stand against the Fenians:

I have read over O Mahony's introduction very attentively, and I fear it will not do in our work. And by the way, he is just now, I think, in the worst odour possible with the bishops and priests of the Catholic Church. In fact I think the majority of them esteem him excommunicated. Dr. Cullen's pastoral I think says so – of course, without naming him or any one else of the Fenian Brotherhood. And surely, it would be dangerous to have any thing in our work that would cause umbrage in that quarter.<sup>66</sup>

The Society's Prospectus stated that 'The works of the Society will undergo a strict revision by Catholic divines, before issuing from the press'. It would appear that it was in compliance with this policy that they enlisted the aid of Fr John Tracy, D.D., of Clogheen, and formerly of Carrickbeg, a member of the Ossianic Society and a biblical scholar, to read the *Eochairsgiath* from a theological point of view. Fr Tracy duly obliged with an eighty-page commentary which Fleming found crowded, illegible, and 'a world of labour to wade through'. Tracy suggested re-arranging the order of some of Keating's paragraphs, a proposal unacceptable to the editors. Towards the end of the year Fleming was forced to acknowledge to Williams: 'Had we known the difficulty of this undertaking we could scarcely muster up courage to begin it.'<sup>67</sup>

As noted above, only the final section of the edition undertaken by the three men, after the editions of O'Daly and O'Kearney had been rejected, survives today. That would suggest that the work of 1865 had been productive, and we have the further testimony of John Fleming from 1874 to that effect:

Mr. William Williams of Dungarvan has a copy of Eochair-Sgiath an Aifrinn, the Key to the Shields of the Mass – made for the Keating Society from a collation of five and partly of seven manuscripts. While this copy was being made, the opinion of three Irish scholars was taken upon every line of it. An excellent translation of the work was made by Mr. Williams and all was ready for the press when the illness of the Secretary put a stop to the publication.<sup>68</sup>

Whatever the state of preparation of their edition, after 1865, a year of intense editorial activity, no more is heard of the Dr Keating Society. It can hardly be a coincidence that

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<sup>65</sup> *The history of Ireland . . . translated by John O'Mahony* (New York 1857; 2nd ed. 1866).

<sup>66</sup> RIA MS 23 A 58, letter dated 14 December 1865.

<sup>67</sup> RIA MS 23 A 58, letter dated 20 October 1865. Fr Tracy's commentary is also in this collection of documents.

<sup>68</sup> RIA MS 1126 (12 Q 13), Section B, p. 4. The five manuscripts are St John's College MSS 20 and 31, RIA MS 127, NLI MS G 707, and an unidentified source referred to in notes by the three editors as the 'Kilkee manuscript'.

this silence corresponds to the transfer of Fr Meany from Rathgormack and Clonea to become parish priest in Modeligo in 1866. There was more to it than that, however; as Fleming remarked of Fr Meany in a passage quoted earlier: ‘a shadow crossed his mind’. Some years later, Canon Power was more frank: ‘He [*sc.* Fr Meany] had been the victim of what he and others considered unjust treatment; this seemed to prey upon his mind and the result was mental derangement which ended only with his death in 1889’.<sup>69</sup>

Patrick Meany spent little over a year in Modeligo before being transferred to Clogheen in 1868. Here the parish was placed in charge of a succession of administrators during his periods of hospitalisation. He died, 10 August 1889, in St Patrick’s Asylum in Waterford. He was buried in Clogheen where a stained-glass window was installed to his memory in the parish church by his nephew, Fr O’Connor. Following the onset of his mental illness, and his transfer to the west of the diocese, for whatever reason – perhaps financial,<sup>70</sup> mixed with feelings of deep exhaustion – Fleming and Williams felt they could not continue with the edition of *Eochairsgiath an Aifrinn*.

### **An Teagasg Críostuidhe**

The failure of the Dr Keating Society was not absolute. Even while John O’Daly was preparing his edition of *Eochairsgiath an Aifrinn* for the Society, William Williams was at work on an ancillary project. This project was later mentioned by John Fleming when he recalled his initiation in Irish studies:

My *active* career in the cause began a little more than 27 years ago. I have before me a portion of a letter dated the 10th of June, 1862, sent to me by Mr. William Williams of Dungarvan. From it I learn that he had some days before sent me an Irish MS. to examine, and that I had called his attention to something in the beginning of it. In the letter he wrote in reply: ‘I am glad to find that the Teagasg has not remained a dead letter in your hands. One reader will detect at a glance an error that might never appear to another, and hence it was that I was so urgent with you to set about the work. Now that you have fairly begun, I trust that you will make good use of your pruning knife.’ The Teagasg was the catechism that Mr. Williams had corrected and enlarged for the Keating Society, which the Rev. Patrick Meany had founded not long before. The examination of this MS. was what made me set about studying the Irish language critically.<sup>71</sup>

The work to which Fleming referred here was a new edition by Williams of Bishop Michael O’Reilly’s catechism, which dated from about 1727,<sup>72</sup> and which went through

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<sup>69</sup> Power, *Parochial history*, 77.

<sup>70</sup> Canon Power remarked elsewhere that the failure to go to print was due to lack of funds: ‘John Fleming, Irish scribe and scholar’, *The Irish Book Lover* 25 (1937) 77–81: 79.

<sup>71</sup> *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 4/34 (1890) 30–31.

<sup>72</sup> Pádraig Ó Súilleabháin, ‘Roinnt Caiticeasmaí Gaeilge’, *Éigse* 11 (1964–6) 113–15: 113.

many printings in the early nineteenth century. On the occasion of the publication of his edition Williams explained to John Windele:

It was solely with a view to afford the public some little proof that the Society had not died out that, at the request of my Bishop, I undertook this little tract, taking upon myself the entire labour, expense, and risk of its publication.<sup>73</sup>

When precisely Williams began his work is uncertain. The edition was to some extent in manuscript form by June 1862, when he enlisted the help of John Fleming, which in turn leads to the supposition that Williams had begun his work some time in 1861. Assuming that Williams's statement to Windele reflects the true position, it would appear that the need to salvage something for the Society occurred to the former as early as the very year the Society was founded.

None of this apprehension, of course, was evident when the work was eventually published in 1863. The printer was John Fowler, who had been retained to print the *Eochairsgiath* whenever it should appear. The book was printed in two versions, one in Gaelic type, the other in Roman type,<sup>74</sup> and a number of gilt-edged, cloth-bound presentation copies, signed by Williams, containing both Gaelic and Roman versions, still survive.<sup>75</sup> For a long time afterwards the Gaelic type was referred to as 'Keating Society Type',<sup>76</sup> and it was to be used again in the pages of *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* of which John Fleming was among the founders, and its second editor. This typeface has been identified as that commissioned by John Henry Newman from George Petrie for use in the Catholic University of Ireland, and has been re-named Newman Irish Type.<sup>77</sup>

The book, measuring 147 x 92 mm, was bound in paper wrappers bearing the half-title ('an teagasg críostuidhe le fuirionn dhochtúir céitinn') in Roman on both versions. It was organised as follows:<sup>78</sup> pp. [i] title-page ([ii] blank); iii–v Preface, signed 'W.W.' (vi blank); 1–3 Censure<sup>79</sup> and Approbation;<sup>80</sup> i–vii 'Short Instructions for the use of

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<sup>73</sup> RIA MS 4 B 23/55(i).

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Séamus Ó Casaide, 'The Keating Society Catechism', *Catholic Record of Waterford and Lismore* 5/51 (1917) 285–7. I am grateful to the late Mr Gus Mac Amhlaigh, Dublin, for graciously allowing me to study the copies in his collection.

<sup>75</sup> E.g. Fr Ulick Bourke's copy (NLI Ir 283o3), Richard D'Alton's (RIA LR/2/D/18), Fr Philip Fitzgerald's (of Ballingarry, author and Keating Society Council Member, Gus Mac Amhlaigh collection).

<sup>76</sup> E. W. Lynam, *The Irish character in print 1571–1923* (Oxford 1924) 34–5.

<sup>77</sup> Dermot McGuinne, *Irish type design* (Dublin 1992) 118–22.

<sup>78</sup> Pagination follows the Gaelic version; the Roman version does not correspond exactly, so that 'an chrich' in the Gaelic version is on p. 84, and on p. 82 in the Roman version. The ensuing server's responses for Mass begin on p. 83 in both versions, showing that the plates for the Roman version had been made prior to those of the Gaelic. This compounds the bibliographical curiosity of p. 7 in both versions following the blank p. [viii].

<sup>79</sup> Supplied by Fr Patrick Meany, C.C., Hon. Secretary, Ballyknock, 10 January 1863: 'I have carefully perused the manuscript of an Irish Catechism, written by Mr. W. Williams

beginners' ([viii] blank);<sup>81</sup> 7–31 prayers and litanies; 32–79 Teagasg Criostuidhe, including (72–9) 'Gearr-theagasg air shacraimint dhul-fa-laimh-eapuig'; 80–84 'Aithghearra an chreidimh is inléighte do'n phobul Dia-domhnaigh, agus go minic in gach uile theaghlach', ending (84) 'an chrich'; 83–89 (Roman type) 'The manner of serving at Mass' (prayers and responses in Latin, instructions in English), ending (89) 'finis' ([90] blank).

The title-page reads:

*An / Teagasg Criostuidhe, / agus na gnáth-úrnaighthe; / Nuadh-scríobhtha agus Léir-cheartuighthe, / le Fuirionn Dhochtuir Céitín: / re h-aonta aird-easpuig Chaisil agus Imligh, / agus / na n-easpog uile chuigidh Mumhan . . . Cuireadh an leabhar-sa i m-buan-chló / le Seon F. Fobhlaeir, / Ninteoir, Reiceadóir, agus Leabhar-Cheanaídhe, / i m-Baile Atha Cliath / a.t. m.duiii.lxiii*

The preface is signed by Williams at Dungarvan on St Patrick's Day 1863, and in it he sets out the history and purpose of the publication:

The Irish version of Dr. O'Reilly's Catechism, upon which this little volume is based, having passed through numerous editions in the hands of printers unacquainted with the language, the later issues are so filled with errors of various kinds as to render the book of little practical use.

The Council of the KEATING SOCIETY having completed the arrangement for the publication of the first volume of their TRANSACTIONS, Doctor Keating's great work on the MASS, lost no time in adopting measures to bring out a new and correct edition of this popular and useful catechism. At the outset it was intended simply to reproduce the old book in a new and correct form; but the Lord Bishop of Kerry recommended its being enlarged, by the addition of instructions upon several important subjects not embraced in it. This, his Lordship was pleased to observe, 'would make the work complete as an elementary catechism' . . . .<sup>82</sup>

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for the Keating Society, and can confidently say that it is, for the size, the very best I have yet seen. It is accurate in doctrine, quite correct in its orthography, and in style uniform and clear throughout.'

<sup>80</sup> Individually supplied by the Archbishop and Bishops of the Archdiocese of Cashel, recommending it to the clergy and laity of their respective dioceses, and dated March 1863, with the exception of that of Dominick O'Brien (Bishop of Waterford and Lismore), which is dated 1 February. Drafts of the Censure and of the Approbations of the Archbishop of Cashel and the Bishop of Waterford and Lismore are preserved in Waterford City Library, Canon Power Scrapbooks: Album p. 79.

<sup>81</sup> Notes on alphabet, and on sounds of vowels, diphthongs, triphthongs, consonants, aspirated and eclipsed consonants.

<sup>82</sup> Here Williams quotes extracts from the letter of William Abraham, Bishop of Waterford and Lismore, to Philip Barron (*Ancient Ireland* 1/1 (1835) 9).

. . . the dioceses of Waterford and Lismore have the good fortune of being governed by a learned Prelate whose deep knowledge of our native language is only equalled by his zeal for its cultivation; a fact which finds significant expression in the existence, both in his Lordship's own college, and in some of the public schools in these dioceses, of flourishing Irish classes. The kind encouragement and warm support which the Society has experienced at the hands of the revered Archbishop and Bishops of the province, who have kindly stamped this, our first effort, with the seal of their authority, have decided the Council to bring out a series of works of an educational character, with a view to aid those who are determined no longer to suffer the reproach of being ignorant of their native language. The little work now printed is the first of this series; and it is fondly hoped that, apart from its primary use as a manual of Christian doctrine, it will be found a useful class-book in the hands of the many thousands who, throughout the province, are now learning to read and write the olden tongue.

In concluding these brief remarks the writer feels it his pleasing duty to acknowledge his obligations to the Most Rev. Doctor O'Hea, Lord Bishop of Ross, for the valuable aid he has received in bringing out the catechism. Whilst the book was passing through the press his Lordship kindly undertook the labour of revising and correcting the proofs, a task for which his profound knowledge of our native tongue eminently qualified him, and which entitles him to the warm thanks of the Society.<sup>83</sup>

Noteworthy here is, first, the suggestion that the edition of the *Eochairsgiath* was nearly ready for publication – something which, while it was in the hands of John O'Daly, was believed to be true – and, second, that the publication of the catechism represented the first in ‘a series of works of an educational character, with a view to aid those who are determined no longer to suffer the reproach of being ignorant of their native language’. In other words, the objectives of the Society, as laid out in the Prospectus, were being achieved. The publication of the catechism corresponded to the intention, expressed in the Prospectus, to ‘publish elementary works of instruction in the Irish language’. Although Williams himself had borne all the work and the expense, he still seems to have been content to attribute the work to the Dr Keating Society, in an effort to save some of the Society's credibility. For this Fr Meany must have been duly grateful, and this might, in turn, explain his unsuccessful efforts, in the wake of the publication of the catechism and at the suggestion of John Windele, to have Williams appointed to the chair in the Catholic University left vacant by the death of Eugene O'Curry.<sup>84</sup>

Williams's editorial work on the catechism has been analysed by Michael Tynan.<sup>85</sup> His verdict on this work is that ‘The lay-out is very good, Williams proved an excellent editor

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<sup>83</sup> Williams, *Teagasg Criostuidhe*, pp. iii–iv.

<sup>84</sup> RIA MS 4 B 23/89(ii) and 98; *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 3/26 (1887) 20. In 1862 Fr Meany had contributed £1 to the relief fund for O'Curry's family (*Nation*, 8 November 1862).

<sup>85</sup> *Catholic instruction in Ireland 1720–1950* (Dublin 1985) 53–6.

.... The Council of the Keating Society did O'Reilly proud'. This modern assessment, however, is at odds with John O'Daly's opinion of the book when it was published, as recorded later by Fleming:

When the small Catechism by the Keating Society was being published, a certain Dublin publisher, who was disappointed in not getting the printing of the tract, purchased a number of copies of it as soon as it came out, and went through it closely, marking the omission of every dot, hyphen, &c., in the margin. He went a step farther, and wherever he found a word in it that could be spelled in different ways he made a correction, and in this way dotted the margins of the little work very fully. These corrections he made in a number of copies, keeping one exposed on his counter, and sending others through the post to different persons. I was asked to take him in hands, and showed that some scores of the words in his table of errata were spelled as in the Catechism by standard writers, nay, that a number of these words, were so spelled by the corrector himself in works published by him.<sup>86</sup>

Williams remained indifferent to O'Daly's criticism, which he interpreted as arising from his irritation at his work on the *Eochairsgiath* being deemed unsatisfactory by the Society. 'I have neither time nor inclination to enter the lists with this brawler', wrote Williams, 'and must only allow his rage time [to] expend itself.'<sup>87</sup> In many ways, the Society, in their over-ambitious Prospectus, had given too many hostages to fortune. This was hinted at, for example, in the notice that the *Teagasg* received in the *Irishman*. While welcoming the work as 'useful', the paper also mentioned the length of time that it had taken for the Society to produce a publication:

Here we have the first fruits of the 'Keating Society', which has been silent so long – though not for want of support. The Council has, it seems, also completed the arrangements for publishing Dr. Keating's great work on the Mass, so we may expect it shortly.<sup>88</sup>

The approbations and recommendations of the bishops doubtless ensured the success of the catechism and its status as 'for half a century ... the authorised manual of religious knowledge for the Cashel province.'<sup>89</sup> In token of this, the print-run of 5,000 had been sold out by 1874, at which time, according to Fleming, Williams was contemplating a second edition.<sup>90</sup> This plan, however, was never executed due to Williams's untimely death in Dungarvan, 14 July 1875, at the age of 55.<sup>91</sup> A second edition with a print-run of

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<sup>86</sup> *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 1/8 (1883) 263–4.

<sup>87</sup> RIA MS 4 B 23/55(i).

<sup>88</sup> *Irishman*, 1 August 1863.

<sup>89</sup> Power, *Waterford & Lismore*, 135.

<sup>90</sup> RIA MS 1126 (12 Q 13), Section B, p. 1.

<sup>91</sup> While Williams is largely forgotten today, his nephew, Senator Patrick W. Kenny, mentioned in a Seanad debate of 1924 that he 'was supposed to be the greatest living

500 was eventually produced by Canon Patrick Power in 1901.<sup>92</sup> This edition used the plates of pp. 7–79 of the 1863 Gaelic-font edition, which had remained in the possession of the Williams family in Dungarvan. The original pagination was therefore retained, but there was a new title-page, and the original censure, approbations, preface and language instructions were omitted. A new p. 80 was added, containing a version of the Our Father and the Angelus ‘mar is gnáthach do rádh i gcúige Mumhan’.<sup>93</sup>

It is somewhat ironic, after all their talk of and engagement with manuscript texts, that the Dr Keating Society’s sole publication should be a new edition of an oft-printed work, O’Reilly’s catechism. But in that fact alone, the reworking of a popular book, lies perhaps a faint suggestion of success. A booklet of less than one hundred pages, selling at two shillings a dozen,<sup>94</sup> was a far cry from the six-shilling annual tome of 400 pages contemplated by the Keating Society Prospectus. The print-run of 5,000 is itself an indicator, however, that the Society realised how popular the catechism would be – they could never have hoped for such a run for any of the contemplated editions of Keating. And so, albeit fortuitously, and solely through the generosity of William Williams, the Keating Society became the first of the nineteenth-century learned societies to reach an audience outside of the educated middle-class that they themselves and the other societies had to depend upon.

Of the three protagonists in the Dr Keating Society, only John Fleming was in a position to derive any lasting benefit from the experience. Retiring from teaching in 1880, he was appointed to the position of Scribe at the Royal Irish Academy (1881–93), in succession to Seosamh Ó Longáin. There, he renewed his involvement with Keating’s prose in his capacity as assistant to Robert Atkinson in preparing an edition of ‘Trí Biorghaoithe an Bháis’.<sup>95</sup> Fleming was also involved in the early years of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language. He kept a critical eye on this organisation as he played a major part in the break-away Gaelic Union, a society ultimately echoing the Keating Society in size

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authority in his time on Ogham writings, and was also a founder of the Keating Society’ (Seanad Éireann Debates, II, 16 January 1924).

<sup>92</sup> (Ath-chló-bhuailte ag Muintir h-Arbhi i b-Portlárige, 1901). Letter from Fr Power, referring to print-run, in RIA MS 23 A 58. The censor for this partial reprint was Fr Maurus Phelan, one of John Fleming’s former students. A re-edition of Williams’s book, at the suggestion of Eoin MacNeill, had previously been contemplated in 1896 by another of Fleming’s former students, Fr Michael O’Hickey: Pádraig Ó Macháin, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in Mount Melleray Abbey Co. Waterford* (Dublin 1991), 8 (1) 46.

<sup>93</sup> The Williams/O’Reilly versions of the prayers are on pp. 10–11.

<sup>94</sup> *Nation*, 1 August 1863 (advertisement).

<sup>95</sup> Geoffrey Keating, *Trí bior-ghaoithe an bháis* RIA Irish Manuscript Series II/1 (ed. Robert Atkinson, Dublin 1890). Fleming’s involvement is noted in Seathrún Céitinn, *Eochair-sgiath an Aifrinn* (ed. Patrick O’Brien, Dublin 1898), p. iv. A token of the connection between Atkinson and Fleming are two phrasebooks of Waterford Irish written by Fleming and formerly in Atkinson’s possession: RIA MSS 922 (23 L 41) and 924 (23 L 43).



and energy, but far more successful in its primary publishing activity, *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge*, of which Fleming was editor 1884–91.

Six years before his death on 27 January 1896, John Fleming paid eloquent tribute from the columns of that journal to his two collaborators of nearly thirty years previously:

Nobody who lived with these men for years, could help loving the Irish language which they had loved and worked for so unselfishly.<sup>96</sup>

## **Appendix**

### **The Keating Society Prospectus<sup>97</sup>**

The “Dr. Keating Society” has been established with a view of printing, publishing, and thus rescuing from destruction, the Catholic and religious works written in the Irish Language, by some of Ireland’s most gifted scholars, and still remaining in our unpublished MSS. as monuments too little known, although attesting great learning.

The primary object of this Society will be, to place such works within the reach of all, who feel a love for the dear old tongue, and desire to preserve one of the characteristics of our Nation’s vitality—its native language; while, at the same time, solid and useful instruction will be communicated to all by the Society’s publications.

The Society shall consist of at least 500 members; and having been initiated in the Province of Munster, shall be under the management and control of the Archbishop of Cashel as President, with the Bishops and a select number of Priests and Laymen, Irish Scholars of the Province.

#### **President.**

His Grace the Most Rev. Dr. Leahy, R.C.A.B., Cashel.

#### **Vice-Presidents.**

The Most Rev. Dr. Delany, R.C.B., Cork.

The Most Rev. Dr. Keane, R.C.B., Cloyne.

The Most Rev. Dr. O’Brien, R.C.B., Waterford and Lismore.

The Most Rev. Dr. Moriarty, R.C.B., Kerry.

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<sup>96</sup> *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 4/34 (1890) 31.

<sup>97</sup> *Nation*, 4 May 1861; and a copy of a separate flier supplied to me by Dr Pádraig de Brún. Thanks are due to Dr de Brún for reading a draft of this paper; to Bishop William Lee for permission to consult material in the Diocesan Archive of Waterford and Lismore; and to Fr Ned Hassett for many kindnesses.

The Most Rev. Dr. O’Hea, R.C.B., Ross.  
The Most Rev. Dr. Flannery, R.C.B., Killaloe.

### **Committee of Management.**

Burke, Very Rev. Michael, P.P., Clonmel.  
Cantwell, V. Rev. W., Dean, Cashel.  
Croke, V. Rev. T. W., D.D., President St Coleman’s College, Fermoy  
Croke, V. Rev. T., V.G., P.P., Charleville.  
Cooney, Rev. William, P.P., Clerihan.  
Cahill, Rev. Richard, C.C., Thurles.  
Delany, Rev. Patrick, V. President St. John’s College, Waterford.  
Duggan, V. Rev. P., P.P., V.G., Doneraile.  
Fitzgerald, Rev. Phil., P.P., Ballingarry.  
Fitzpatrick, Rev. John, P.P., V.G., Middleton.  
Hally, V. Rev. Jer., V.G., Dungarvan.  
Howley, V. Rev. James, P.P., Tipperary.  
Kenny, V. Rev. James, P.P., V.G., Ennis  
Leader, Rev. Henry, P.P., Skibbereen.  
Laffan, Rev. Martin, P.P., Killenaule.  
Murphy, V. Rev. Dominick, Dean, Cork.  
Morrissey, Rev. Patrick, P.P., Ballyneal.  
Madden, V. Rev. Morgan, P.P., V.G., Clonakilty.  
M’Carthy, V. Rev. Justin, Canon, Mallow.  
Murphy, Rev. Tim., P.P., Youghal.  
Murray, Rev. T. L., P.P., Glountane.  
Mulcahy, Rev. Ed., P.P., Timoleague.  
Murray, Rev. Tim., P.P., Roscarberry.  
Murphy, Rev. Cornelius, C.C., Listowel.  
O’Mahony, V. Rev. Denis, Aghabologue.  
O’Brian, Rev. Francis, College, Waterford.  
O’Shea, M. B., Venerable Archdeacon, Cork.  
O’Brian, Very Rev. Morgan, P.P., V.G., Mitchelstown.  
Power, Very Rev. Nicholas, P.P., V.G., Killaloe.  
Power, Rev. Maurice, P.P., Killeagh.  
Quaid, Rev. P., P.P., Callaghan’s Mills.  
Russell, Very Rev. John Dean, Cloyne.  
Wall, Rev. William, Administrator, Thurles.  
Williams, Esq., William, Dungarvan.  
Windele, J., Esq., Blair’s Castle, Cork.

### **Treasurer**

James O’Connor, Esq., National Bank, Carrick-on-Suir.

### **Honorary Secretary**

Rev. Patrick Meany, R.C.C., Ballyknock, Carrick-on-Suir.

It is hoped that this new Society will constitute a rallying point for the patrons of Irish literature of every class; for, while it is Catholic in its object and management, it does not exclude from its ranks Nationalists of *every shade* within the four seas of our island. Hitherto, from a variety of causes but too little has been done to save from utter neglect the MSS. bearing on the National faith.

To remove the imputation of neglect, or want of laudable efforts in this direction, is the chief end proposed in establishing the “Keating Society,” and to this end, worthy of its best energies and our ancient faith and hoary memories, its members will devote their exertions, and apply the means at their command.

It will be seen at once, that the field of literary labor, which the “Keating Society” proposes to work, is outside the limits of other antiquarian societies, and that they and it can work side by side without confusion, without injury or trespass upon the province of the other.

The moderate charge for membership will be within the reach of the middle classes; thus offering an inducement to many an humble but intelligent patriotic man to join the ranks of the Society. Those above them will naturally encourage a society so much wanted and so long desired, as a means of affording that instruction to all, both high and low, which no Irish Catholic can lack without shame, and which must inspire a deeper, fonder love for the Land of our Fathers, the “*Insula Sanctorum*.”

We may reckon confidently upon the success of this *National* undertaking, sanctioned, as it is, by the illustrious Bishops of the Province and by several exalted dignitaries of the other Provinces, not less anxious to promote its pious and patriotic object, and to lend it their energetic support. Amongst those stands pre-eminent the first of Irish scholars, the illustrious Archbishop of Tuam.

Moreover, many excellent Irish scholars amongst the laity have promised their co-operation. One is already at work on Dr. Keating’s learned treatise, “*Eochair sgiath an Aifrinn*,” or, a Defence of the Mass, a work well known to our Munster scholars, and which will form the first volume of the Society’s publications.

Dr. Keating, a Munster man himself, having done so much for the religion and literature of his country, has suggested a name and title to the Society, than which none more appropriate could be selected, whether we look to the special aim of the Society, or to his distinguished labors in the field of Irish literature.

Though confessedly one of the first of Irish scholars, Dr. Keating has had no monument to perpetuate his memory; the Keating Society, though lately organised, will be an appropriate one to commemorate his great name.

The “*Book of Lismore*,” a manuscript about 500 years old, contains the lives of some of our Irish saints—among them the lives of St. Declan, patron of Ardmore, and of St. Mochuda, or Carthage, patron of Lismore. These shall form some of our early volumes.

Zeal and energy on the part of the friends of the Society are alone required to render it eminently useful and popular. If each such friend but take the trouble to enlist the support of a few more like himself, we shall at once see the “Keating Society” fully developed, and the good work quickly spreading beyond the most sanguine expectations, and making itself felt through the length and breadth of the land.

To carry out the views of the Society, it is proposed to publish one yearly volume of 400 pages or thereabouts, with a *literal translation*, and to deliver it, bound in cloth, at 6s, *free* to each subscriber.

The works of the Society will undergo a strict revision by Catholic divines, before issuing from the press.

As a thing germane to the objects of the Society, it is intended to publish elementary works of instruction in the Irish language.

Those, who wish to become members of the “Keating Society,” are requested to forward their name and address to the secretary, the REV. PATRICK MEANY, Carrick-on-Suir; and as soon as 500 names are received the first volume will be put to press.

Waterford, 23rd *April*, 1861.