

## **The Story of Nine Young Waterford, Ireland Men!**

In 1846, due to the failure of the Repeal Movement (formed by Daniel O'Connell) to reinstate the Irish Parliament (voted out of existence in 1800, with passing of Act of Union), a group of young men broke away from a more pacifist and constitutional movement to form a group known as The Young Irelanders. This was at a time when the full effects of the Potato Famine were deeply affecting the Irish people. Among the group was a young man called "Meagher of the Sword." Thomas Francis Meagher was the son of the wealthy mayor of the city of Waterford.

In 1848, T. F. Meagher and eight other members staged a rebellion against the British. Their effort was a failure, and all of them were arrested, tried, and convicted of treason against the British Crown. The sentence was to be "hanged, drawn, and quartered." Prior to handing down the sentence, the presiding judge asked the condemned if they had anything to say. The group chose Thomas Francis Meagher to speak on their behalf because he was the only one of them who was educated. (Because of family circumstances, he was educated at Chongowes Wood in Kildare and Stoneyhurst in England by Jesuits.) These are his words, spoken so eloquently.

"My Lord, this is our first offence, but not our last. If you will by easy with us this once, we promise on our word as gentlemen to try to do better next time. And, the next time, sure we won't be fools enough to get caught."

The judge was furious and indignant and had no hesitation in ordering the aforementioned sentence. However, news of the event permeated the world's media, and eventually protests from many forced Queen Victoria to change and commute the sentence to transport to the penal colonies of Van Diemen's Land (Australia) for life.

Twenty-three years later, in 1871, a Sir Charles Duffy was elected Prime Minister of the Australian State of Victoria. When H. M. Queen Victoria was advised of the appointment, she was quite amazed as he had been one of the nine young men transported as a convict for high treason. She requested the records of the other eight men, and this is what she learned: Both Terence McMannus and Patrick Donohoe were Generals in the U. S. Army. Richard O'Gorman was Governor General in Newfoundland. Morris Leyne was Attorney General of Australia, and Michael Ireland later succeeded to that position. Thomas McGee was President of Council for the Dominion of Canada. John Mitchell was a prominent New York politician whose son later became Mayor of New York City. Thomas Francis Meagher was Governor of Montana.

Meagher escaped from Van Diemen's Land by whaling ship and went to America where he played a role in the Civil War founding the Irish Brigade who fought at Antietam in 1862, and at Fredericksburg, Virginia, losing five thousand men. General Robert E. Lee declared he never witnessed men so brave as the Irish Brigade which did much to ensure the Union victory. Meagher died in 1867, under suspicious circumstances, having fallen overboard from a steamboat moored on the Missouri River. There is speculation as to his death as he incensed his enemies by defending the exploited blacks against forerunners of the Ku Klux Klan.