The Late General Michael Collins

Dead Chief's Obsequies

A Nation in Mourning

Unseen hands pressing upon the heart-chords.

That was how one felt yesterday during the ceremonies at the Pro-Cathedral (says a writer in the *Irish Independent* for August 29).

I had passed from the streets where the color note of the morn was blue of the sky and gold of the molten sun shining through filmy cloud. All side gates and entrances leading to the church were closed and guarded. Near the church our tickets for admission were carefully scrutinised; then we were marshalled in the queue.

Arrangements for admission were very thorough, very systematic, and admirably functioned.

Before entering the Cathedral I had been witness to the mighty mustering of mourners. Had the sky been grey as a winter sea still would the people have come out to mourn. But Nature herself seemed to join her benison to the universal tribute; she seemed to desire that all that was mortal of Michael Collins should pass for ever from among his people, not beneath the gloom that some would link with death, but amidst the radiant promise of an Irish autumn that would be in keeping with the fair places to which the dead warrior and statesman had led his people's fortunes. As the August sun ripens the harvest to reward the trials of arduous husbandry, so too, may we symbolise yesterday's heartening sun as gilding our hope of reaping soon the harvest which the Idol of the People made possible by years of work and endeavor and occasions of achievement.

Inside the Cathedral doors I was directed to the organ gallery. Up here I found a strange gathering of journalists, photographers, choristers, clergymen, artists, and cinema operators. They all were busy—silently. What they had to do was done mutely. Choristers sat and waited. Photographers snapped machines that seemed to work on oiled hinges; artists and journalists scribbled their impressions on what seemed pads of velvet paper. Nothing disturbed the hallowed serenity of the shrine.

Looking out from our lofty view-point the eye rested on the virgin white altar draped in sable and gold. Six candles in burnished holders illumined and decorated the High Altar, whose blanched marble was thrown into relief by the background of heavy crape and white trimmings.

In front of the High Altar was the coffin on the catafalque. Through the stained and patterned window of the southern gallery the sun streamed into the temple. It fell softly across the rich coloring of the coffin's shroud. It lighted up the gold and green and washed the white of the drooping tricolor.

The eye was held for a moment by the stiff and motionless sentinels standing rigid around the bier. Thence it strayed to other figures in the vicinity. In the front seat were Mr. Sean Collins, brother of the deceased General, and other male relatives. In the second row knelt Sister Mary Celestine, Miss Hannie Collins, and the Rev. Mother of the Convent of Mercy, Endsleigh. In this group of sorrowing relatives were at least half a dozen ladies. Near at hand was Miss Kitty Kiernan, accompanied by her sister.

In the body of the church one picked out personages famous in the world of arts and letters—Sir John Lavery, stooped and thoughtful; Mrs. T. P. O'Connor, author of historical romances; Mr. Darrell Figgis, grave and paler than usual; Mr. Lennox Robinson, dramatist and theatre manager; Mr. Henry Owens, traveller and writer; Miss Margaret Fortescue, linguist and poetess. These and many others of many creeds and representative of many lands.

Scattered here and there also in the congregation I had various persons pointed out to me: An old, humble-looking, worn woman with stringed bonnet kneeling near a confession box in view of the coffin, was the charwoman who came daily to a house which Michael Collins used to use as a hiding-place in Black-and-Tan days. Standing over in a corner was an old man with wrinkled, troubled face, a well-known Dublin car-driver, who nobly served the man whom he proudly knew as Chief. Not far from the catafalque on the Gospel side sat a girl, looking frail and delicate, with her mother and father. It was this girl I was told who, just back from hospital after an operation, was taken very seriously ill after midnight about last Christmas twelve months, and it was Michael Collins, a complete stranger, staying next door at the time, who went out into the night at the risk of his life to fetch a priest and doctor.

A group of three well-known sportsmen, one an ex-international Rugby player; a blind musician from Cork; two Stock Exchange members, Protestants and Unionists; a Scottish soldier in mufti whom Collins had befriended when the young soldier was wounded and in bad case in a scrap near Westland Row—these also were mentioned to me as being amongst the congregation.

At eleven o'clock the church was not crowded. But the congregation was fittingly representative. Suddenly a hush fell on the people. A whispered "S—s—sh" stabbed the silence. The organ, after a preliminary dirge, boomed into Chopin's "Marche Funebre." We heard the sursh-sursh of moving feet, and sensed the entry of the slow and stately procession. It brought us the first splash of moving color to relieve the pervading gloom. It was simple and solemn.

The purple of the bishops and monsignori, the pure white surplices of the priests, the dark brown of the Friars, the cream of capes and hoods and habits of various Orders—all had their part in a pageant and color scheme that was not ordered, and gripped the human heart by the spontaneity of its effect. Eight Prelates of the Church and long lines of lesser attendants passing by the corse—passing between the dense ranks of the high and the least of a country's people. That was at the core of this spectacle that was not meant to be spectacular.

How fitting, too, that the Archbishop of Dublin should preside at these ceremonies, and that the Bishop of Killaloe—he who christened Michael Collins, "The Idol of the People," should be celebrant of the Mass.

We needed some outlet for emotion. Music helped. The choir, in augmented forces, burst into Gregorian chant. It uttered for us that which would otherwise remain unuttered and unutterable. It told what Requiem music in such surroundings only can tell—the majesty of death, the message of the faithful, and the Glory of our Father. Some chord in unison with what we heard was touched within us and the heart replied.

Of all the music heard yesterday nothing was more inspiring than the "Libera Me" of Emil Nikel's Requiem for unaccompanied voices. There was something deeply devotional in the "Quando Coeli" when the voices swelled out in crescendo and rolled to the roof and echoed in the eaves.

Previous to that we had the "Sanctus" in soft and repressed volume. Then followed the "Hosannah," when the Cathedral reverberated with waves of tonal grandeur, and became flooded with the mellow radiance of lighted candles.

The next voice heard was that of the deacon from the altar addressing the congregation in Gaelic, and asking prayers for the repose of the soul of General Michael Collins.

Then followed the last Absolution, our prayers in unison, and a lightening of our grief in the consoling thought inspired by these ceremonies that the heart of man is as the bosom of the earth that blooms again and again.

Honor and sympathy could do no more. Pity had but one more tribute to give. It was to the veiled figure in black—the sweet-faced and sad-faced Sister Mary Celestine—she to whom the Commander-in-Chief of Ireland's Army was "Baby Michael." She was brave and gentle. She walked after the coffin beside her weeping sister Hannie, with the Rev. Mother on the other side.

The people bowed their heads as she passed, and she, too, bowed in response to a sympathy which, without any means of expression, yet by some telepathy of the soul, must have been conveyed to her.

The melody of Beethoven's mighty dirge (played at the request of military friends by ex-Commandant Lynch, the maestro of Frongoch) sobbed itself away in broken accents as we slowly left the church. And as I stood at the door I counted at least half-a-hundred women in this congregation. I did not see half-a-dozen who were not red-eyed or weeping or pale with suppressed feelings.