

CANON HAYES, RURAL IRELAND'S APOSTLE

WE regret to announce the death of Very Rev. John Canon Hayes, Parish Priest of Bansha and founder of Muintir na Tire. He became ill last week and entered a Tipperary nursing home where, last Friday, he underwent a major operation.

It was not until after the week-end that his condition gave cause for anxiety. He died yesterday morning.

Canon Hayes was admirably equipped to tackle the problems facing rural Ireland.

He was born in the country and brought up and lived most of his 69 years in rural Ireland.

Father evicted

His father was a small farmer in Limerick who took so active a part in the Land League movement that he was evicted from his holding.

John Hayes, the man who was to be honoured by Ambassadors and Ministers of State, was born in a poor hut built for the family by the Land League, the youngest of ten children.

As a boy, he attended Murroe National School, and later, when he decided to study for the priesthood, went to the Jesuit College of the Sacred Heart in Limerick.

He completed his theological course in Paris, and was ordained in 1913. His first curacy was in Co. Meath, and he then went to Liverpool, where he ministered under Archbishop Downey.

Dockside riots

Working in the dock areas he saw the hardships of the Irish emigrants and found, too, that there was a strained atmosphere among the Catholic and Protestant workers.

To short-circuit the intermittent riots which flared up because of the tension between the two groups, he began to cultivate both sides, mixed with them at work and in the dockside public houses.

Soon they came to listen to this soft, quiet-spoken priest and the rows ended.

When he sailed home in 1924 a band composed of Orangemen and Catholics solemnly played him aboard . . .

His first curacy on his return was at Castleiney in North Tipperary. Later he ministered in Tipperary town for 12 years.

It was in 1946 that he was given the appointment which made his new parish and the office he held a password throughout the country and beyond it: Parish Priest of Bansha.

Rural week-end

Most countries of the world which are to-day faced with the problem of holding their rural population know of Bansha because of the role it played in the formation of Muintir na Tire.

For it was here that Fr. Hayes began quietly putting into practice the system which was later to become official policy for Rural Ireland.

He helped his parishioners to form their own groups to co-operate in growing crops from fruit to grain.

It was in 1933 that his activities brought about an experimental rural week-end. It was held in Roscrea, the guests finding accommodation in the monastery guest house.

There were the usual doubts as to how many might attend or what it might achieve. But the very first night of the week-end swept them away for they hadn't enough beds to go around.

Fireside chats

This difficulty was turned into a blessing. The guests who were unaccommodated decided the best way to spend the night was to close in round the fire and chat about life generally in rural Ireland.

Through the night problems

were brought up and solved or partly solved with the benefit of advice from people who had already encountered the same problems.

The night's lesson was so instructive that it was decided to make Fireside Chats an integral part of Muintir na Tire.

At Ardmore in Waterford in 1937, Muintir na Tire was officially founded and since then the movement has spread and flourished until today there are branches in the four corners of Ireland.

But though it has grown, there is still no change in the system on which Canon Hayes first based the organisation—neighbourly charity. That was, and is, the cornerstone of the organisation; each branch is as big as the parish and embraces everybody in the parish irrespective of class, race or creed.

And it is entirely voluntary—all its officials today, with the exception of the few paid organisers at headquarters in Bansha, give their services voluntarily.

Travels abroad

Canon Hayes's philosophy is known far beyond the shores of this country, recorded by writers of many nations and by his own pen and spoken word.

In 1934, he lectured at the Eucharistic Congress in Buenos Aires, and in 1949 he represented Ireland at the Council of the National Catholic Rural Life in Columbus, Ohio.

He again represented this country at the International Congress in Rome in 1951, and two years later he went to Barcelona as president of the Catholic Migration Commission.

At home, his position as founder of Muintir na Tire took him all over the country to small parish halls and public meetings where he continually urged the adoption of the Muintir na Tire policies.

In 1947, when a strike almost paralysed the Irish Sugar factories, Canon Hayes intervened to effect a settlement and was later presented with a gift by the NAIDA from a country-wide fund opened as a mark of the nation's gratitude. It went into the Muintir na Tire funds.

The Pope's letter

But it was in the Marian Year—1954—that his work brought Canon Hayes the greatest tribute he could receive: an Apostolic Letter from His Holiness the Pope.

This, he said, "put the seal of approval on the gospel of Muintir na Tire and carried the Christian message of the movement throughout the world."

In Ireland, the people had already given their approval by adopting the philosophy of Canon Hayes by doing as he did and urging others as he urged them.

Canon Hayes is survived by two brothers and one sister: Mr. Michael Hayes and Miss Anne Hayes, of Murrce, and Mr. Thomas Hayes, of Bray.

And yesterday, when the first news of his death was made known, the greatness of Ireland's loss was quickly shown by the messages of sympathy and tributes which followed.

Taoiseach's tribute

The Taoiseach said: "The news of the sudden death of Canon Hayes has come to me as a great shock. It was only last evening that most of us heard that he had been taken ill. To me his death has caused a feeling of deep personal loss.

"In founding and building up the great organisation of Muintir na Tire, Canon Hayes under-

took a task of real national importance and of true patriotism in the best sense of the word.

As he once said himself: 'In our movement based on a Christian community life, we have a solution for home problems and a world message worthy of Ireland's Christian past.'

"That movement will miss his guiding hand and kindly personality. His death will be a loss not only to Muintir na Tire but to the nation."

Mr. de Valera said:

"Canon Hayes's death is a serious national loss. His idea of organising the parish so that all within it would be conscious of a social unity and ever ready to co-operate for mutual help and in all matters of common interest, was fundamentally sound.

"I regret that he has not been spared to see every parish in our country so organised and his hopes realised.

"The foundations, however, have now been well laid and though his own genial and energetic personality will be missing, I am confident that Muintir na Tire, the organisation which he created, will be faithful to his ideals and continue to expand and flourish.

"Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dilis."

'Deeply moved'

His Excellency the Apostolic Nuncio, Most Rev. Alberto Levame, has sent the following telegram to Fr. Walsh:

"Deeply moved unexpected death Canon Hayes. I offer heartfelt prayerful sympathy bereaved parish Bansha and Muintir na Tire. Testimonies of virtues of excellent priest and great organiser. Apostolic Nuncio."

General Mulcahy, Minister for Education, said:

"From Donegal to Wexford men and women close to the soil of Ireland and with all the ramifying influences which that gives them on Irish life generally, will mourn the passing of Canon Hayes, but will know that they have cause to praise God that in vital formative years for the country He gave them such a man tirelessly to preach charity in parochial and in public life and to plough the field of labour and good works in which that virtue can best seed and fructify."

Mr. Dillon, Minister for Agriculture, said: "The death of Canon Hayes was a grievous loss to his friends, but it was also Ireland's bereavement."

'Great leader'

The Archbishop of Boston, Most Rev. Dr. Cushing, said:

"I am shocked to hear of the death of my dear friend, Canon Hayes. He had a very great constructive programme for the new social order in Ireland—a programme popularly known in America as the 'Back to the Land' movement.

"He was one of Ireland's great modern leaders. God rest his soul."

Messages of sympathy were also sent by Most Rev. Dr. Rodgers, Bishop of Killaloe; Most Rev. Dr. O'Doherty, Bishop of Dromore; Mr. Robert Briscoe, T.D., Lord Mayor of Dublin; Mr. Sean MacBride, T.D., and Ald. G. E. Russell, Mayor of Limerick.

Sean P. O Sheaghda, secretary of the N.A.I.D.A., said: "Canon Hayes's death will be a grave loss to Irish agriculture and industry. He was one of our keenest and most energetic members for many years.

"The great movement which he built and the work which it accomplished under his guiding genius will remain as a fitting monument to his vision and organising ability."



HAYES (Bansha, Tipperary) — On January 30, 1957, at a Tipperary nursing home, Very Rev. John M. Canon Hayes, P.P., Bansha (founder and chairman of Muintir na Tire). R.I.P. Remains were removed to Bansha yesterday (Wednesday) evening. Office and Requiem Mass at Bansha on to-morrow (Friday) at 11.30.