

Daniel O'Connell.

DANIEL O'CONNELL was born near the town of Cahirciveen, County Kerry, Ireland on August 6, 1775. He attended the first Catholic school that had been established since the enactment of the Penal Laws. This had been founded at Cork by Father Harrington. His parents were resolved that he should have a good Christian education and history tells us how O'Connell profited by it. His later studies were pursued at St. Omer and Douay.

He became a lawyer in 1798 and from that on vehemently opposed the unjust laws against his co-religionists. Ireland at this time was in a pitiful state. The dark and evil days of "ninety-eight" had closed in a nation's tears and blood. The Act of Union was carried and Emmet's unsuccessful rising had taken place. Then followed black and bitter despair. The people were hopeless and helpless. The landlords crushed the very lives out of them. An alien church levied tithes and the Orange clubs tyrannized it over the unfortunate Catholic.

This was the condition of Ireland when O'Connell took up her cause. He pitted himself against the power of England and the hopelessness of Ireland. Never before had a patriot set himself to so mighty a task. He made strong and forceful speeches against the Act of Union. He imitated none of the great orators of the day; neither Burke, nor Sheridan, nor Curran, nor Gratton. He had a style all his own. He did not seek to seduce or dazzle or surprise his hearers but to make them clearly understand the question and to convince them. In the plainest and strongest language he stated the facts that most concerned the case and urged the consideration that ought to influence his countrymen.

In 1823 O'Connell founded the Catholic Association. Under it were marshalled the entire forces of Catholic Ireland, moral and physical. More than a million of members were enrolled in its ranks and the eloquence and ability displayed in its proceedings have never been excelled in any other popular movement. England at this time scoffed at the idea of Catholic Emancipation but this power was irresistible. O'Connell himself attributed the principal power to the people. He said: "It was not I, nor any man in my