

called a Presidential program. . . . he allowed the initiative in such matters to rest with Congress. . . . it seems probable that Lincoln would have done little to strengthen the Presidency in the absence of a crisis." Equally interesting and enlightening are Mayer's discussion of the Republican Old Guard during the Progressive Era, his treatment of Alf M. Landon's place in the Republican Party (Landon allowed Mayer to quote from his papers), and his sketch of Calvin Coolidge. Mayer's excellent account should remain the standard one of the Republican party for many years.

Reviewed by VINCENT P. DE SANTIS

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## *Murder in Pennsylvania*

***The Molly Maguires***, by Wayne G. Broehl, Jr. *Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964. vi+ 409 pp. \$8.95.*

IN THE COURSE of almost a century the violent secret society, known as the Molly Maguires, of Irish miners in the Pennsylvania anthracite fields has become a folk legend of a bloody sort, the theme of popular ballads, even the source of a Sherlock Holmes tale, *The Valley of Fear*. And well it might. For it has its roots not only in the frontier tradition of physical force but in the fate of the Irish famine immigrants in the New World, in group racial conflicts and in the violence of the emergent American labor movement. Added to this is the operation of the Pinkerton Agency, as well as a detective-story saga in which the facts are almost too bizarre to make credible fiction.

Ireland has had a dark history of secret terror societies. Such societies, indeed, have traditionally been the only means of redress for the uneducated and unorganized peasantry for whom the government and its officials were always "they". In Donegal in the 1840's and 50's the name Molly Maguire was a fearful one. She herself was a fiction, like Kelly the Boy from Killane, but in the nineteenth century Molly Maguire came to connote the most violent and reckless of the bands striking against landlords and agents. The name meant murder.

Any account of the Molly Maguires in Pennsylvania is incomplete without the Irish background, yet this link over the water has been neglected by historians. Wayne G. Broehl's present history of this

Pennsylvania terror organization is enlightened by the year he spent in Ireland tracing down the primary sources. In addition he has had the unique opportunity of inspecting the secret Pinkerton reports made for the Reading Railroad by undercover operatives in the coal fields. These records, together with Allan Pinkerton's letterbooks, make it possible to see the Molly Maguires in perspective.

There used to be a Victorian joke about a shipwrecked Irishman cast up on a foreign beach. His first remark was: "What's the government? I'm against it." But the joke, as Victorians were aware, had a harsh residue of truth to it. Having been conditioned at home to regard the government as an alien, oppressive, and implacable force, the Irish fugitive from the Famine found little in America to change his opinion. He was the useful but despised source of cheap labor, a digger of ditches who for all the natives cared might die of hunger. "A race that will never be infused with our own, but on the contrary will always remain distinct and hostile," said Mayor Lyman of Boston. And in belated agreement the Jim Curleys and the Honey Fitzes replaced the Lymans to take the Bostons away from the Bostonians. The newcomers felt they had stormed and captured an enemy fortress. Even when such politicians were caught with their fingers in the municipal till, they never felt themselves dishonest. They were merely getting their own back from "them."

The influx of the Irish into the Pennsylvania anthracite fields from the 1840's on aroused the Know-Nothing impulse of the native Americans and in turn fostered Irish allegiance to the American-founded Ancient Order of Hibernians. In Pennsylvania the English and the Welsh had the best jobs. The worst were left for the Irish. Characteristically they stuck burr-like to their Celtic enclaves with the twin landmarks of church and tavern. A people apart, they seemed in the front they presented to the world a ready-made secret society. For mine operator and superintendent they felt the same hostility that in the old country they had felt for landowner and agent. And they expressed it in the same way. From 1863 to 1867 there were over fifty unsolved murders in Pennsylvania's Schuylkill County alone, and it was the common belief that the Molly Maguires were responsible. Whether the old society really had migrated overseas, how widespread it was, how powerful, no one knew; but the name became as feared as it was in Ireland.

The counter-challenge to the Molly Maguires came from Franklin Benjamin Gowen, president of the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad and ironically the

son (though Protestant) of an Irish immigrant weaver. Gowen's determination to crush the recently formed union, the Workingmen's Benevolent Association, and make himself the czar of the coal fields which he was acquiring for the Reading led indirectly to the death struggle between himself and the Molly Maguires.

In 1873 after a series of beatings of mine supervisors, of murders, derailing of cars, and arson in the rail and coal holdings of the Reading had shown the police to be powerless, Gowen approached Allan Pinkerton, the founder of the first professional detective agency in the United States. Pinkerton assigned one of his younger agents, an Irishman named James McParlan, to go to Pennsylvania and infiltrate the Molly Maguires.

In the grim aftermath of the evidence that McParlan eventually collected, ten Molly Maguires were hanged in one day. Subsequently the Pinkertons and Gowen were accused of hiring an agent provocateur. McParlan himself has been considered on the one hand a depraved informer, on the other a man serving "his church, his race and his country" beyond the idea of pecuniary gain. McParlan managed, in fact, to be a double personality in his long, singular, and dangerous masquerade.

He was a Catholic, born in Ireland and with a fair knowledge of the secret societies overseas. It is true that his church had condemned such societies in general and the Molly Maguires in particular, but the members still considered themselves good Catholics, and McParlan was being asked to play the hated role of informer on his fellow countrymen, those who belonged to his church, his background, his ways of thought and manner of speech. Why he took this role and how he felt about it he did not say, but he played it with gusto, and Mr. Broehl's examination of the Pinkerton records is at least able to make clear what he did and what he was not. He was not a provocateur, neither was money his chief object. Possibly what appealed to him most was the excitement of this double life.

On the 27th of October, 1873, James McParlan left Philadelphia—his identity unknown even to Gowen—and stepped off the train at the mining center of Port Clinton as James McKenna, an itinerant tramp. McParlan-McKenna spent the next two and a half years in the coal regions. Wandering from one small settlement to the next along the Schuylkill River, he managed within a few months to win

the confidence of his miner countrymen. A boy for the taverns, a hard drinker, and an open treater, who could with equal deftness fight or clog or sing a ballad, he explained himself to his new associates privately as being on the run for murder and his money (genuine enough) as being counterfeit. In Pennsylvania, he soon discovered, the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Molly Maguires were synonymous.

Within six months McParlan was inducted into the Shenandoah Lodge of the Hibernians and given the current Molly Maguire sign and passwords. After a time he became the unofficial leader of the lodge, a familiar of the county inner circle of Mollies, the officers and the bodymasters—those who arranged what men were to be beaten or murdered. He even "sparked" the sister-in-law of one of the leaders, all of course in line of duty. One of the conditions of his employment was that he would never have to reveal his identity by testifying in court, but in the end he became suspect and was marked down for murder himself. "A miraculous intervention of Providence," Gowen called it, for since McParlan was known to be an informer and a detective, there was nothing to prevent him from appearing in court.

Naturally McParlan was the star witness of the ensuing trials that led up to the multiple hangings. Such, in brief, is the story of the Molly Maguires, given so amply and revealingly in this new and for the first time adequate study. The implications are large. This violent chronicle ending in its day of retribution was generation-remembered in the coal fields. The Mollies, and the union with them, were smashed, the Pennsylvania lodges repudiated by the national organization of the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

In the aftermath the use of detective agencies for the surveillance of unions in the United States became commonplace as did the increased use of company police forces. This was only part of the Molly inheritance. Gowen may have felt satisfied at having made the world safe for the company town, but underneath the imposed calm the tensions in the coal fields remained, eventually to break out even more savagely in the years to come. The Molly Maguires were gone but their legacy of violence and counter-violence remained.

Reviewed by FRANCIS RUSSELL