

## Book: A lesson for our time

**Daniel O'Connell: Nationalism Without Violence** by Raymond Moley; Fordham University Press, New York; 1975.

In producing a biographical essay on Daniel O'Connell, the nineteenth century Irish patriot and politician, Raymond Moley has given us a treatise rich in commentary on the land question and instructive on the politics of reform.

Writing in his retirement in Arizona, Dr. Moley has made scholarly use of the considerable material available on O'Connell's extensive and successful law practice, his political organization of Ireland in the early 1800's, and his Parliamentary career in the second quarter of that century. Moreover, the author has brought to his subject an analytical faculty sharpened by his own political experience and his skill as a journalist.

The result is a highly readable account of the birth of Ireland as a nation, in the modern sense of the word, and of the activities of its political midwife. As every student of George knows, this emergence has been complicated, and often thwarted, by absentee landlordism bolstered by British politics. Dr. Moley doesn't slight this part

of his story.

He does a creditable job in rescuing O'Connell's reputation from the damage done it by the generation gap. After a quarter-century of leadership in a non-violent struggle that won a measure of democracy for his people, O'Connell saw his accomplishments denegated by a new generation impatient for total independence. Dr. Moley suggests that much of the ensuing strife, perhaps even the horrors in recent headlines, might have been avoided had O'Connell's precepts continued to be followed. But then men like O'Connell do not come along often, and without the power of their personalities to enforce their wisdom, lesser men are easily led astray.

Aside from the story and apart from the maligned patriot, the book is interesting for such nuggets as: "All of the philosophical pondering about democracy that fills innumerable books and gives employment to a large aggregation of college professors, preachers, and politicians, seems to come down to at least one conclusion — that the idea of people choosing their own masters is absurd, and that the concept of people making the laws which they must obey is incomprehensible. But along with the philosophers there are also the practitioners,

who call themselves statesmen. Their purpose is to make the thing work by cutting off as much power of the people as the people will stand for, and by arranging for constitutions, representative assemblies, and delegated power. We have thus been able to live with democracy in a limited form, but while we do so, we recognize its vast inefficiency. We rationalize the situation, as Winston Churchill did, by saying that democracy is full of imperfections but it is better than any form of government that we have seen."

Seeking the source of his hero's leadership (we would call it charisma today), the author comments: "All manner of damage has been inflicted upon this world by leaders so wedded to dogma and ideology that, in the name of a conviction, they have been willing to wade through turmoil and blood to impose upon the millions who have been foolish enough to accept them as leaders: Stalin, Hitler, Cromwell. O'Connell, in taking positions on public questions, always made sure there was room for readjustment when conditions changed. He also had that redeeming virtue so rare among reformers — indeed in all political leaders — a sense of humor. Dogma and humor make uneasy partners."