



# 1916

THE 1916 RISING:  
PERSONALITIES &  
PERSPECTIVES

*an online exhibition*

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### Michael O'Hanrahan

Michael O'Hanrahan (1877-1916) was born in New Ross, Co. Wexford, the son of Richard O'Hanrahan and Mary Williams; Richard, a cork cutter was said to have taken part in the 1867 Fenian rising. The family moved to Carlow where Michael was educated at Carlow Christian Brothers' School and Carlow College Academy. When he had completed his education he worked in various employments including a stint with his father in the cork business. He joined the Gaelic League in 1898; the following year he established a branch in Carlow of which he became secretary. As an extension to his Gaelic League activities he taught Irish at the Catholic Institute. From around that time he tended to use the Irish form of his name—Mícheál Ó hAnnracháin.

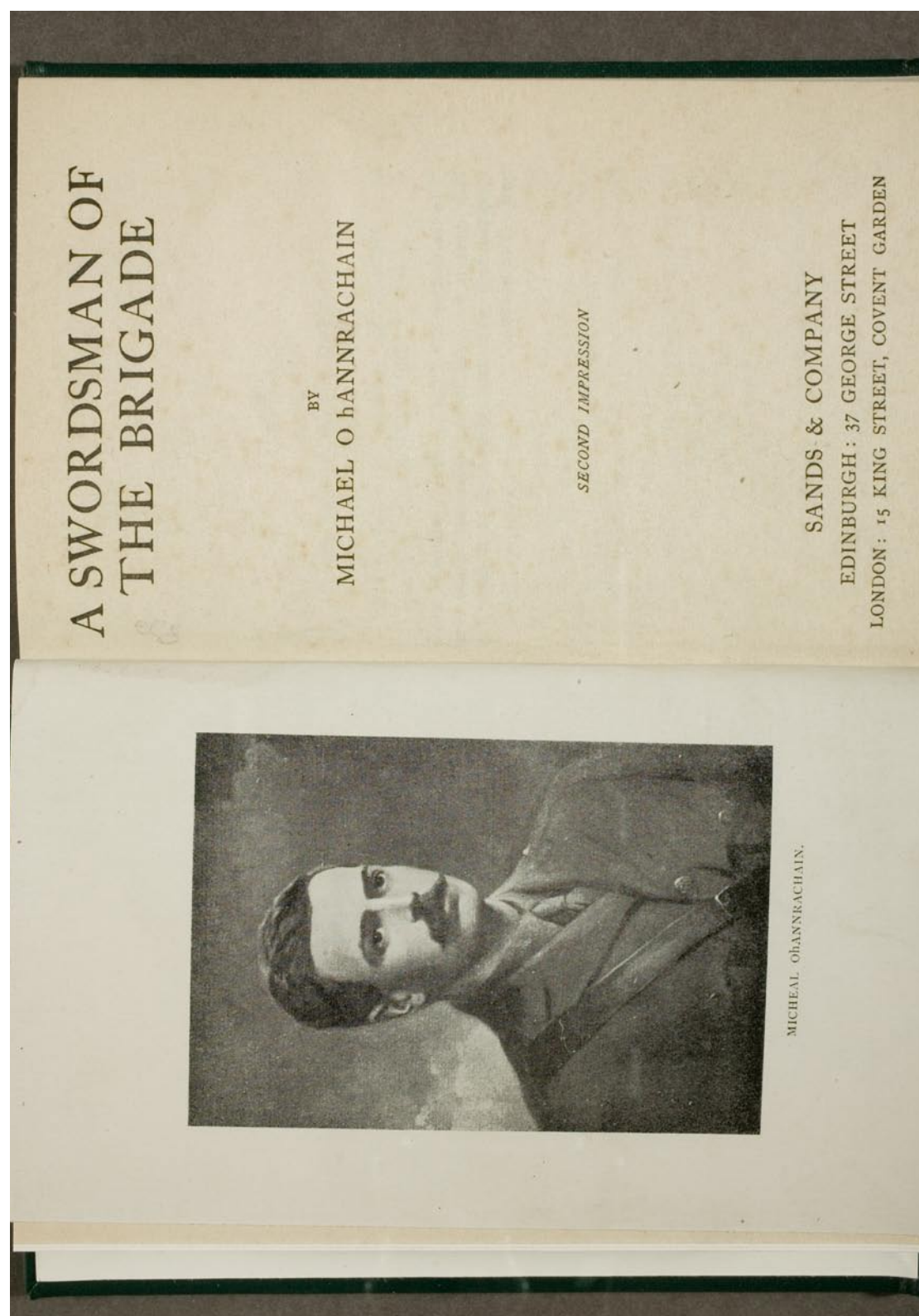
By 1903 he had moved to Dublin where he worked as a proof-reader for Cló Cumann which produced Gaelic League publications. He worked concurrently as a freelance journalist for various nationalist newspapers, including *Sinn Féin* and the *Irish Volunteer*, under the by-lines 'Art' and 'Irish Reader'. He also wrote two historical novels of some literary merit: *A Swordsman of the Brigade* (1914) and *When the Norman Came* (1918), the former in particular being extremely evocative of its period. Meanwhile, he was an active member of the Gaelic League, serving as an energetic member of various committees and giving Irish classes and occasional lectures.

Politically aware from his early youth, O'Hanrahan became involved in some of the more radical nationalist campaigns of the day: for instance, in 1903 he joined Maud Gonne and Arthur Griffith in opposing the visit of King Edward VII to Ireland. Impressed with Griffith's ideas on economic self-sufficiency and his proposal for the withdrawal of nationalist MPs from Westminster, O'Hanrahan joined Sinn Féin. He was also sworn into the Irish Republican Brotherhood. He joined the Irish Volunteers on their formation in November 1913, later being employed as an administrator on the headquarters staff at 2 Dawson Street. He became quartermaster-general of the 2nd Battalion of which Thomas MacDonagh was commandant. He and MacDonagh enjoyed a close friendship arising from their shared interest in writing and literature.

In the Rising, O'Hanrahan served in Jacob's biscuit factory where he was third in command under MacDonagh and Major John MacBride. He was taken into custody following the surrender of the Jacob's garrison on Sunday, 30 April. He was tried by court-martial and executed on 4 May. His brother Henry, who was with him in Jacob's, was likewise sentenced to death, but his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.



Michael O'Hanrahan. (Keogh 89).



Pages from the second impression of *A Swordsman of the Brigade*, which was first published in 1914.



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## DEDICATION

To the memory of a father to whom I owe much, whose life's quest is over, and to one other, my mother, who whispered hope when days were black, I dedicate this book.—THE AUTHOR.

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A SWORDSMAN OF  
THE BRIGADE

## CHAPTER I

## ONE NIGHT IN CATHAIR DOMHNAILL

ON a dark and tempestuous night in the beginning of the year of grace 1703, a stout little lugger crept out of a secluded creek on the coast of Kerry, having on board, myself, Piaras Grás, and many another lad who had given the word which enrolled us comrades of those other brave fellows who had trailed their swords across many a battlefield, and made their names synonymous with dashing bravery.

The night was suited to the enterprise. Across the sky scudded heavy masses of cloud through the rifts of which the moon peeped out fitfully. From the land the rain blew in heavy sheets, carried by a wind which moaned and whistled through the cordage of our little vessel.

But what cared stout Seamus Og, the master of the swift sailing smuggler, though winds blew high and skies looked black? For many a time had he sailed his gallant craft in the teeth of wind and wave, carrying his cargo of brave recruits away to France. How many a time had not his lugger shown her heels to the cruisers of Dutch William, treading her way in and out of the creeks and inlets indenting the Kerry coast, where they dared not follow. How



WHEN THE NORMAN  
CAME

MICHAEL O'HANRAHAN

MAUNSEL AND COMPANY LIMITED  
DUBLIN AND LONDON. 1918



HE WAS NONE OTHER THAN THE ONE-EYED PRINCE OF BREIFNE

## WHEN THE NORMAN CAME

floor and loop and window. These foreigners shall remember the Tower of Reginald."

Hastily beams were piled against the great oaken door. At the turnings of the narrow stairway rough barricades were thrown up. Behind the battlements watched stern, fierced-eyed men.

"MacMurrugh," it was the chief, Ragnall O'Faolain, who spoke in Cian's ear, as he drew him aside. "I fear the end is near. Our walls were less stout than the hearts of our men. But what of Torgil? I do not see him here."

"Yonder by the Tower of Turgesius he lies," replied Cian sadly. "He died fighting as he wished to die."

"Ah, it is a sad day for us," said Ragnall. "How many of us shall see its close?"

"I care not," cried Cian. "But hark to the enemy." From the street below sounded loud blows on the oaken door. But it withstood them stoutly.

"Now, my friends," shouted Ragnall, "strike!"

"MacMurrugh Abu!" yelled Cian, jumping ahead to assist at the dragging forward of a huge beam which was being pushed over. Downwards it shot, carrying destruction into the crowd of yeomen who were battering at the door. But now the arrows began to whizz through the air, and men began to fall.

"Back! back!" roared Cian. "Take shelter. Let no head be seen."

Across the roof came staggering the burly blacksmith, bearing a huge stone.

"Comrades, we will send them a welcome messenger," he shouted, laughing wildly.

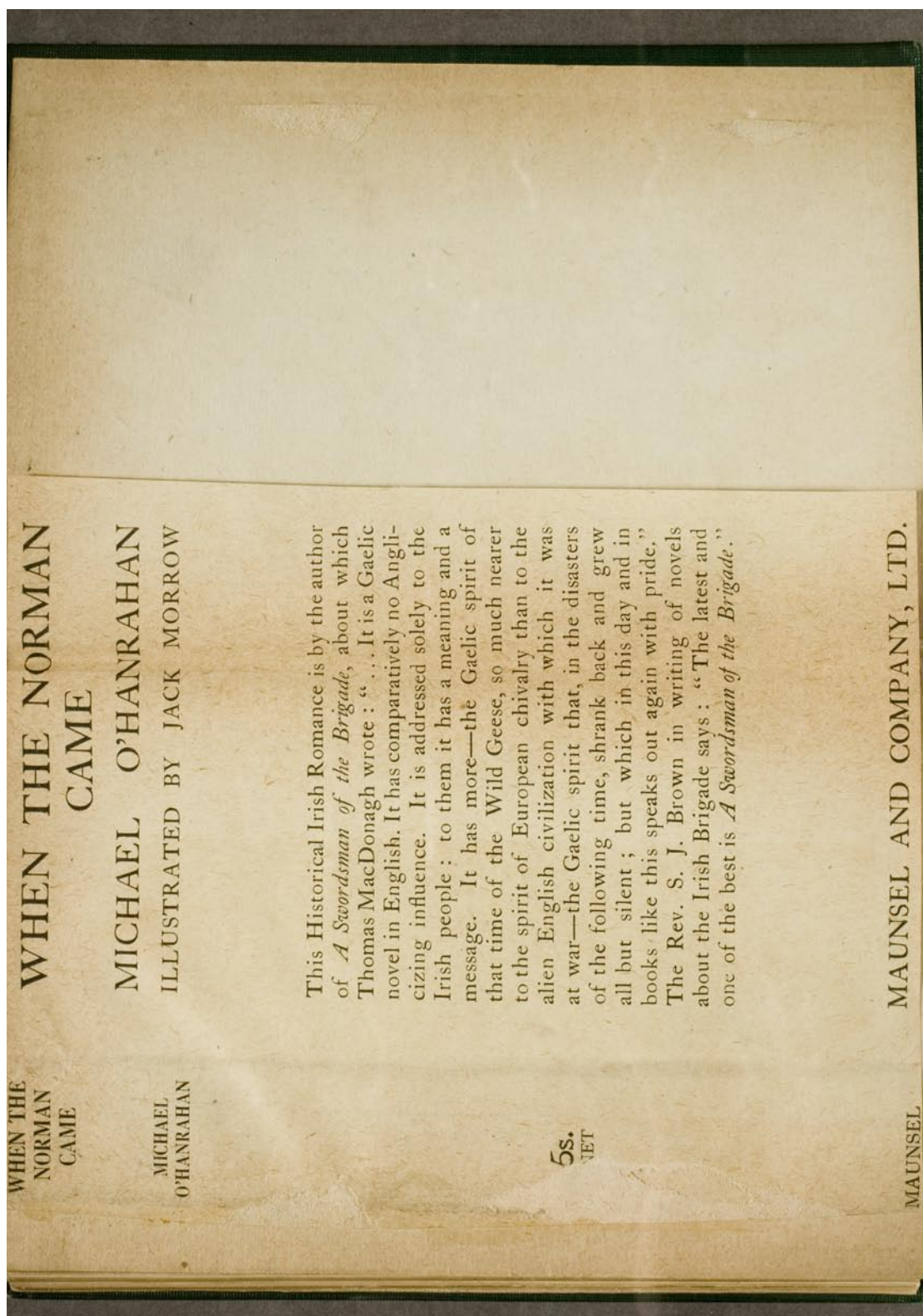
And over the battlements he cast his "messenger," which carried death to many beneath. But an arrow whizzed through the air. With a wild cry the blacksmith leaped out into space, the feathered shaft buried in his bosom. Thus the fight went on. At bay, knowing they had no mercy to expect, the townsmen fought like tigers. Their oaken door held out

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WITH A WILD CRY THE BLACKSMITH LEAPED INTO SPACE



Extracts from *When the Norman Came* (1918).





A commemorative postcard. The railway station in Wexford town and the bridge over the river Barrow at New Ross are named after Michael O'Hanrahan.