

MAT KAVANAGH: A Tribute

AFTER a brief illness, Mat Kavanagh died on Friday, March 12th; and with him a rich link with the movement's past is severed. Very few comrades have been so widely known in the anarchist movement in this country, for he addressed audiences in many towns right up till recent months. And wherever he spoke he renewed old acquaintances and made many new ones. His influence was especially strong with the younger members of the movement, for not only did he introduce many of them to anarchism, but he opened up for them a whole world of individual anarchists of the past who would otherwise have remained unknown to them.

Mat Kavanagh was indeed a "good old chronicle" of the anarchist movement which he had entered in early youth when he came to England from his native Dublin. He knew and worked with Kropotkin, Malatesta, and Rudolf Rocker in the years before the war of 1914, but he knew well also the less well known militants who helped to build the English and Scottish movements, and in later years he wrote a series of articles on the lesser known pioneers of English anarchism in FREEDOM. Just how far back his personal memories went was illustrated by his anecdotes about old Edward Craig whom Mat knew at the end of his long life, and who, in his early manhood had been the inspirer of the Owenite Commune at Ralahine in the years 1830-33.

During the war of 1914 Kavanagh, together with Tom Keell and Malatesta, adopted the anti-war position and opposed the paradoxical attitude of Kropotkin, Jean Grave, and others who supported the war. He was an equally determined opponent of war in 1939 and never deviated from the traditional anarchist posi-

tion of anti-militarism. A vigorous debater, he held his opinions firmly and stated them clearly. Yet one may doubt if he had any enemies at all, for he possessed a singular kindness and his most downright utterances were nevertheless clothed in the most genial form which made it impossible even for political opponents to take exception to them.

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Mat was the antithesis of the arm-chair revolutionary. He was always at the active centre of the movement's work and came into contact with almost all the continental anarchists who from time to time took refuge in this country. The sweetness of temperament which he shared with Kropotkin by no means inclined him to pacifism any more than Kropotkin himself, and he had much experience of clashes with authority. He was, in fact, imprisoned no less than 9 times, always on revolutionary issues, and could discourse most entertainingly on the prisons of these islands.

1916 found him in Dublin, for he had sensed the coming Irish rebellion and had joined with Larkin and Connolly in preparing for the Easter uprising. He was never, however, deluded by the nationalist aspirations of the Irish which finally triumphed over the revolutionary ideas of 1916, and his anarchism was just as unacceptable to the Irish Free State as to the British Empire.

During the years after the old FREEDOM ceased regular publication and Tom Keell had retired to White-way, Gloucestershire (a colony which in its earliest, anarchist, days Mat helped to establish) he was one of the most militant of those who kept the ideas of anarchism alive. Hence he was able to provide one of the links with the past for the

renewal of impetus which anarchism received from interest in the Spanish Revolution of 1936.

After the last war he spoke on behalf of the Union of Anarchist Groups at one of the International Anarchist Congresses in Paris (characteristically making new friends among some of the younger French comrades), and was probably the most regular speaker in the London Anarchist lecture series and at Hyde Park until in recent years he, too, retired to Whiteway. During the last year of his life he moved to the cottage of a comrade in the Wye Valley.

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Mat was 78. His wealth of reminiscences continually reminded one of his age; but his upright brisk figure, his twinkling eye and his love of conviviality always contradicted his years and on his last visit to London a few months ago he seemed as full of youthful zest as ever. This effervescent love of life never left him though those who knew him well were aware also of private sorrows of which the death of his only son, when still not twenty, during the early years of the last war, was the most afflicting.

Wherever he found himself Mat was always an anarchist. His experience taught him to adhere to the traditional ideas of the movement and his judgment was always sane, well-balanced and expressed with characteristic humour. Few men of such determined views were less fanatical, yet Mat would say that that was simply the anarchist philosophy—to hold clear views and hold them firmly, but with tolerance and respect for the rights of other individuals. All of those who knew him will be sad at his death, but his life was a rich and a good one, and he lived it to the full. J.H.