

Angel of Death

DEFIES MARTIAL LAW.

Sinn Feiner's Release from Captivity.

Forced March followed by Dead March.

Tragic Sequel to Kilkenny Arrests.

"Stone walls do not a prison make nor iron bars a cage."

There is a law greater than martial law. There is a Supreme Tribunal to whose summons all earthly tribunals, military or civil, must yield obedience, and from whose unerring judgments the divine qualities of justice and mercy are never absent.

We had in Kilkenny this week an illustration - a tragic and dramatic illustration - of the unfailing truth of the old saying "Man proposes and God disposes." The death under startling sudden circumstances - circumstances so full of pathos as to invest it with deep significance - of a respected young citizen of Kilkenny, Mr. John Kealy, merchant, Upper John street, made dear to the ; meanest understanding how weak, futile and ineffective the summonses and commands of even the mightiest earthly power, and how readily its carefully thought out plans may be confuted and confounded, when the Supreme Judge issues His final and inexorable decree.

"Stone walls do not a prison make nor iron bars a cage", nor can bayonets and rifles, machine guns and armoured motor cars withstand the assaults of the One Great Power, Whose ultimatum brooks neither avoidance nor delay.

Elsewhere in our columns we allude to the arrest under martial law of a number of young men in our City and County who are said to have been members of or sympathetic with the Sinn Fein Irish Volunteer movement. These arrests began last week, and were continued up to Monday, one of the last to be taken into custody on that day being Mr. John Kealy.

For nearly twelve months he has carried on business as grocer and spirit merchant at "The Kilkenny House, adjacent to the railway station. This well-known establishment was formerly owned by the late Mr. D. Lenehan, T.C. and by Mrs. Lenehan, who conducted the business after her husband's death; and on Mr. Kealy's marriage in June last year to Miss Lenehan they took over the establishment from Mrs. Lenehan, who had purchased, and now conducts, another establishment near to the Military Barracks. Mr. Kealy was one of the most unassuming, sincere and popular young men in Kilkenny. For several years before his marriage he acted as manager for Mr. Peter Corcoran, the Distillery Stores, John Street. He was one of the most inoffensive of men. Apart from his business he concerned himself solely with subjects that appealed to his tastes - the promotion of our national games, music, etc. Nobody in the City could truthfully speak an ill word of John Kealy, for he put it in no man's power to speak of him otherwise than as an honourable and patriotic citizen, the son of an honest father who rightly enjoys the friendship and

respect of his neighbours.

We do not, of course, profess to have any knowledge of the grounds which, in the judgment of the military and police authorities, justified his arrest. We can say, however, with perfect knowledge and with absolute confidence that when he was arrested it was well known to many in the City that his state of health was such as to render his arrest and imprisonment, with the consequent excitement that such an event involved, highly dangerous to his life. We say we can speak of this with knowledge and confidence because when we were ourselves told of his arrest our informant added that Mr. Kealy was in a highly nervous state and that he feared the worst results from his incarceration. More than that, the matter was freely mentioned in the City, and it is absolutely inexplicable to us that those responsible for arresting him — he was a man with substantial interest in the City there was not the least likelihood that he would seek to avoid arrest, even if it were possible for him to escape — do not appear to have made themselves acquainted with facts that were within the knowledge of at least a score of people in John Street.

After all, martial law may temporarily abrogate civil law and custom, but it is claiming too much for itself if it seeks, to abrogate the law and custom of Christianity and humanity, and it is our duty, as public journalists to point out that the treatment of the poor fellow who died while being marched as a prisoner through the public streets of Kilkenny, is a matter demanding close and searching investigation.

Various rumours are in circulation concerning this very unfortunate occurrence, and it has been stated on what we believe to be good authority that early on Tuesday morning a report was sent by the prison authorities that Mr. Kealy's condition was not such as to justify his removal. The medical officer, it is said, hastened to the gaol, but before he reached there, Mr. Kealy had already been removed.

As the prisoners, accompanied by a strong military escort, with rifles and bayonets, were proceeding through John Street on the way to the railway station, Mr. Kealy was seen to grow faint, and two of the soldiers assisted him along.

"The Angel of Death was at hand you could almost hear the beating of his wings." When he got as far as McGrath's Hotel - within a few yards of his own house - he utterly collapsed, and it needed no professional eye to see that he was dying. Most happily the Rev. Father Holohan, Adm. St. John's was in time to administer the rites of the Church before he expired.

His body was still in the safe keeping of the military power, but his soul had flown before a Higher Power to meet a Supreme Judge Who is at once just and merciful.

He was not convicted of any offence ; so far as we know he was charged with no offence. A little thoughtfulness, a little Christian charity, a little forbearance, might have saved his life and spared him for his young wife.

One thing is absolutely certain -if he were a felon convicted of the foulest crime, he could not have been treated with a greater lack of everything that we are accustomed to associate with Christian charity.

A defenceless, unarmed prisoner in the hands of an

overwhelming military force, he was dragged from the prison where, if he had been allowed to remain and had received the medical treatment his condition called for, his life might have been saved; but his run down state of health, being wholly unequal to the "forced march" he was obliged to undertake, he fell beneath the burden imposed upon him within a few yards of the house where his young wife was anxiously waiting to wave him a fond farewell.

She never again saw him alive; the door which would have stood open to receive him and to welcome him when he had purged the terrible offence of belonging (if he did belong to it) to an organisation that was as legal as an Orange Lodge up to and even after Easter Monday, admitted instead the dead body of this honourable and upright citizen, who never did a mean or unmanly act, and never uttered a word in malice, hatred or ill-will.

In the name of all right-minded citizens, we protest against such treatment of a defenceless prisoner, and it is an abuse of any known code of law, civil or martial, to permit it to be tolerated. We do not believe the military authorities are responsible. They may be stern in their methods, but they are surely not ruthless in their treatment of a defenceless and unarmed prisoner, charged, as we have said before, with no offence that we have been able to discover.

But the responsibility rests somewhere and the higher interests of justice demand that we should know where to place it.

A coroner's inquest would probably fix the responsibility in the proper quarter, but we are informed that the coroner has no jurisdiction while martial law is in operation.