

Ollscoil na hÉireann
The National University of Ireland

28th June 1963



Conferring of the Degree of
Doctor of Laws

Honoris Causa

on

John Fitzgerald Kennedy

President of the United States of America

*Text of Introductory Address delivered by Michael Tierney, K.S.G., M.A., D.Litt.,
Vice-Chancellor of the University; President, University College, Dublin*

A SHEANSAILÉIR UASAIL IS A LUCHT NA HOLLSCOILE:

SAN aimsir in allód, ba ghnáth le lucht seanchais in Éirinn cur síos in a gcuid Sgéalta ar íontais an Domhain Thoir, ar a chomhact agus a shaibhreas agus ar éachtaí na sár-laochra a bhain leis. Is iomaí sgéal a rinne trácht ar mhac Rí an Domhain Thoir agus a theacht go h-Éirinn. Ní raibh Dohman Thiar ann ar chor ar bith ins an sean-saol úd, ná tracht ar bith ar a chuid curaí. San lá atá anois ann, ‘sé an Domhan Thiar an áit is comhachtaí ‘sa chruinne, an áit is mó íontas agus eachtraí, an áit a bhfuil an chuid eile den chruinne ‘na thuilleamaí uirthi. Ní thagann mac Rí an Domhain Thoir dúinn thar fairrge a thuille le gaisgíocht a theasbáint dúinn. Acht féach anois díreach tá Rí an Domhain Thiar féin in ár meag inniu agus ar ámharaí an tsaoil tuiteann sé amach gur de sean-phór na nGael féin é! Nach ceart agus nach coir mar sin go dtubhramís ómós agus onóir Thar chionn dó?



In presenting on this historic occasion our illustrious guest, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, President of the United States of America, for the degree of Doctor of Laws, *Honoris Causa*, I am proud to feel that I speak, not only for the National University of Ireland, but for the whole Irish people. Our University is itself a living symbol of national resurrection, going back as it does for its origins to the days, now over a century ago, when Ireland, in the words of Charles Gavan Duffy, lay ‘like a corpse on the dissecting table’. The resurrection was beginning even when those despairing words were spoken; and as the indomitable Irish once more made their way to freedom, through all the alternations of strength and weakness, defeat and victory, one support never failed them. They had the help of their own kinsmen in the new Great Power arising across the Atlantic, in whose ‘new birth of freedom’ so many of them played a glorious part. It is to the Irish in America that we chiefly owe the ending of the alien and tyrannical landlord ascendancy. To them we owe perhaps more than many of us realise of the resources, material and moral, which enabled us to survive the final ordeal, and break through to freedom. To them, to their abiding love for, and ever faithful interest in their ancestral land, in the strong and still living roots from which they draw so much of their character and their strength, we owe the greater part of our hope for a prosperous future.

Today we are proud beyond words to be the medium through which the Irish people pay honour to the head of the greatest of all free nations, the nation to which the free world owes it freedom. It would indeed be a splendid fortune for us to be able to include any President of the United States among our honorary graduates, no matter what his ancestry. Our joy and pride are overflowing when the President is not alone the head of the world’s greatest nation, but can trace his lineage back to two of the noblest and most historic Irish families. Mr. Kennedy’s name is itself enough to demonstrate that he is descended from the Dál gCais of Thomond and from the great family who were lords of Ormond from the eleventh to the sixteenth century. The Father of the

original Cinnéidigh was Donnchuan, elder brother of Brían Bóru, most renowned of all Irish Kings and his name is still commemorated in that of the parish of Killokennedy in East Clare. From here the dynasty transferred itself to Tipperary, where the baronies of Upper and Lower Ormond became their patrimony. There they maintained themselves against the Norman Butlers, who took the English title of Earls of Ormond. The O'Kennedys were finally dispossessed by the Cromwellian confiscations in the seventeenth century, but the historian who has traced their fortunes has remarked how, on the victorious conclusion of the land wars in the nineteenth century, their name was still predominant among those to whom the land of Ormond was restored. Some time in the early eighteenth century the ancestor of the President migrated to the farm in County Wexford where his close kindred still remain.

On his mother's side the President is descended from perhaps the greatest of the Norman families who settled in North Kerry and Limerick in the thirteenth century and held an extensive palatine lordship as the Fitzgerald Earls of Desmond. In course of time they were the rulers of all Norman Ireland as the King's Deputies. They also became 'more Irish than the Irish' as the English government complained, and produced one great Gaelic poet, whose name is still popularly remembered as 'Gearóid Iarla' Gerard the Earl. They were later the first Irish dynasty to take up arms in the great struggle against the English crown for freedom of religion, and their leader, James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald, was only prevented by his premature and accidental death from uniting the whole country in that struggle. It was not for nothing that when the Irish in America sought for able champions, they turned to the bearers of names like Kennedy and Fitzgerald.

We have yet another reason to rejoice that the opportunity has been given us to add our little meed to the many academic honours of which the President is already the holder, in the fact that his distinguished father, Then United States Ambassador in London, in 1938 accepted from us the same degree as the one we are to bestow on the President today. At that time, a quarter of a century ago, the President was still a student at Harvard. During the eventful years which followed, he was to gain high distinction for valour and endurance in war, and later to show the skill and energy, the cool courage and prudent foresight in the conduct of public affairs, the power to attract and charm enormous multitudes of men and to give them confidence in his leadership, which have won him the unique position he holds today as head of the free world. His career has been watched in the little country of his forefathers with constant interest and admiration. All Irishmen are truly proud that their ancient race has contributed so much to the making of a great American. They are proud, too, to know that he shares the faith to which they have clung so tenaciously, and that this noble descendant of the lords of Ormond and Desmond has given and continues to give to the whole world so fine an example of Christian family life. In offering him this honorary degree of the National University of Ireland, we all join in praying that he may succeed in his great task of preserving peace, ensuring freedom and maintaining honour, both in his own mighty nation, and in all the nations of the world which look to it and to him for the fulfilment of their brightest and fondest hopes.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS :

Praesento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur honoris causa ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.