

ROYAL COMMISSION
ON THE
REBELLION IN IRELAND.

REPORT OF COMMISSION.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of His Majesty.



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ROYAL COMMISSION.

GEORGE R.I.

GEORGE THE FIFTH, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, to Our right trusty and well-beloved Counsellor CHARLES, BARON HARDINGE OF PENSHURST, Knight of Our Most Noble Order of the Garter, Knight Grand Cross of Our Most Honourable Order of the Bath, Knight Grand Commander of Our Most Exalted Order of the Star of India, Knight Grand Cross of Our Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, Knight Grand Commander of Our Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire, Knight Grand Cross of Our Royal Victorian Order, Companion of the Imperial Service Order; and Our trusty and well-beloved:—SIR MONTAGUE SHEARMAN, Knight, one of the Judges of Our High Court of Justice; and SIR MACKENZIE DALZELL CHALMERS, Knight Commander of Our Most Honourable Order of the Bath, Companion of Our Most Exalted Order of the Star of India, Greeting!

Whereas We have deemed it expedient that a Commission should forthwith issue to enquire into the causes of the recent outbreak of rebellion in Ireland, and into the conduct and degree of responsibility of the civil and military executive in Ireland in connection therewith:

Now know ye, that We, reposing great trust and confidence in your knowledge and ability, have authorized and appointed, and do by these Presents authorize and appoint you, the said Charles, Baron Hardinge of Penshurst (Chairman); Sir Montague Shearman and Sir Mackenzie Dalzell Chalmers, to be Our Commissioners for the purposes of the said enquiry.

And for the better effecting the purposes of this Our Commission, We do by these Presents give and grant unto you full power to call before you such persons as you shall judge likely to afford you any information upon the subject of this Our Commission; and also to call for, have access to and examine all such books, documents, registers and records as may afford you the fullest information on the subject, and to enquire of and concerning the premises by all other lawful ways and means whatsoever.

And We do by these Presents will and ordain that this Our Commission shall continue in full force and virtue, and that you, Our said Commissioners, may from time to time proceed in the execution thereof, and of every matter and thing therein contained, although the same be not continued from time to time by adjournment.

And We do further ordain that you have liberty to report your proceedings under this Our Commission from time to time if you shall judge it expedient so to do.

And Our further will and pleasure is that you do, with as little delay as possible, report to Us, under your hands and seals, your opinion upon the matters herein submitted for your consideration.

Given at Our Court at *Saint James*, the tenth day of May, One thousand nine hundred and sixteen, in the seventh year of Our Reign.

By His Majesty's Command,

(Signed)

HERBERT SAMUEL.

REPORT.

TO THE KING'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.

May it please Your Majesty—

1. We the undersigned now humbly submit to Your Majesty our Report on the matters into which we were directed to inquire.

2. The terms of reference to us were "to inquire into the causes of the recent outbreak of rebellion in Ireland, and into the conduct and degree of responsibility of the civil and military executive in Ireland in connection therewith."

3. In pursuance of these instructions we have held nine meetings, of which five were held in London and four in Dublin. At the first sitting the Commission of Your Majesty was read.

4. We have examined twenty-nine witnesses. They were examined in public except in so far as their evidence dealt with German intrigues or police information. Four other persons submitted to us signed statements, and these will be found in the Appendix immediately following upon the evidence taken in public.

5. We had interviews with various persons who kindly discussed with us the subjects into which we had to inquire. We also received statements from several persons who offered to give evidence, but, having regard to the scope of our inquiry we did not think it necessary to call them as witnesses.

6. We purpose to consider the matters referred to in the following order, namely, (a) the constitution of the Irish Executive, in so far as it is concerned with the maintenance of law and order; (b) the legal power vested in that Executive; and (c) the history of events leading up to the outbreak of the 24th April, 1916, together with our observations and conclusions thereon.

THE IRISH GOVERNMENT.

The executive government of Ireland is entrusted to three officers, namely, the Lord Lieutenant, the Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant, and the Under-Secretary; and for the purpose of maintaining order they have at their disposal two police forces, namely, the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Dublin Metropolitan Police force. "Theoretically," says Sir William Anson, "the executive government of Ireland is conducted by the Lord Lieutenant in Council, subject to instructions which he may receive from the Home Office of the United Kingdom. Practically it is conducted for all important purposes by the Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant." (Law & Customs of the Constitution, ed. 1892, p. 189.)

The Lord Lieutenant (who is also Governor-General) is resident in Ireland. By the terms of his patent he is responsible for the civil government of the country, and the naval and military forces of the Crown in Ireland are under his orders. But, when the Chief Secretary is in the Cabinet and the Lord Lieutenant is not, all powers and responsibility are in practice vested in the Chief Secretary. His policy is the policy of the British Government as a whole, and it is obviously impossible that there should be any other independent authority or responsibility in Ireland. For many years past the office of Lord Lieutenant has been a ceremonial office; apart from the exercise of the prerogative of mercy he has no executive functions. Proclamations, appointments and other State documents are issued in his name, but they are put before him for signature, without previous consultation. He is only furnished with information as to the state of the country which he nominally governs, when he asks for it, and then as a matter of courtesy. The military and naval forces in Ireland take their orders from the War Office and Admiralty respectively.

The office of Chief Secretary is a political office, changing with the Government. The Executive Government of Ireland is entirely in his hands subject to the control of the Cabinet. When the Chief Secretary is a member of the Cabinet, as has been the case in recent years, he is, of necessity, to a great extent an absentee from Ireland. He has to attend Cabinet Meetings, and he is the only person who can, with authority, answer questions and defend the Government policy in the House of Commons. Although the Chief Secretary is in the position of a Secretary of State, he has no Parliamentary Under-Secretary, and the Irish law officers are frequently not members of the House of Commons. During the last two and a half years of Mr. Birrell's nine years' tenure of office, Parliament has been in almost continuous session. He had, therefore, during this critical period but little opportunity of making himself

personally acquainted with the state of affairs in Ireland. He was dependent for information on the reports of his Under-Secretary and the advice given by those Irish members of Parliament whom he chose to consult.

The Under-Secretary is a civil servant, residing in Ireland. For practical purposes he can only take action under authority delegated to him by the Chief Secretary. His duty is to report fully and fairly to his Chief all information that he can obtain, to give his advice freely as to what should be done, and then loyally to carry out the instructions of his Chief without regard to any personal opinion of his own.

For the ordinary maintenance of law and order the Irish Government have two police forces, viz., the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Dublin Metropolitan Police Force. Both forces are under the direct control of the Irish Government, though a rate is levied in Dublin as a contribution to the expenses of the Dublin force (see 12 & 13 Vict. c. 91, ss. 29, 30). It appears that since 1903 the Dublin Corporation have refused to pay the proceeds of this rate into the police fund, and that the matter has been adjusted by deducting the amount from the Local Taxation account. The Royal Irish Constabulary is a quasi-military force. Its members are armed with carbines and taught to shoot. They police the whole of Ireland, except the Dublin police district. When the rebellion broke out the Constabulary was somewhat under strength, as it had furnished a good many recruits to the Army. The military authorities were naturally anxious to get recruits from a body of men with splendid physique and a fine record of honourable service. The Dublin police is also a fine body of men and its numbers were also slightly diminished by reason of enlistments. The force is unarmed, consequently when an armed rebellion broke out in Dublin the police had to be withdrawn from duty. If Dublin, like Cork and Belfast, had been policed by the Royal Irish Constabulary, a thousand armed and disciplined policemen, knowing every nook and cranny of the city, would have been a formidable addition to the thousand soldiers who were available when the rebellion first broke out, and the rebels might have hesitated to face them. As Sir Matthew Nathan expressed it in his letter of the 18th December, 1915, to Mr. Birrell, in the event of an outbreak, "Each policeman would be worth three soldiers." It is clear from the evidence that the two police forces work cordially together, but it is obvious that two separate forces, under separate commands, cannot be in a time of emergency as efficient as a single force under one command. Each of the forces has a small special Crimes Branch, drawn from uniformed men. For ordinary police purposes this branch does its work well, but it is not specially qualified to deal with political crime, which takes no notice of the boundaries of police districts, and which in the case of Ireland assumes an international complexion.

If the Irish system of government be regarded as a whole it is anomalous in quiet times, and almost unworkable in times of crisis.

LEGAL POWERS OF THE IRISH EXECUTIVE.

The legal powers vested in the Irish Government for the maintenance of law and order, and the suppression of sedition must now be considered.

From 1881 to 1906 the Peace Preservation (Ireland) Act (44 & 45 Vict. c. 5)* was in force in that country. Under that enactment the Government had complete control over the importation and sale of arms and ammunition, and over the carrying of arms or the possession of ammunition. The Act was a temporary one continued from year to year by the Expiring Laws Continuance Act. In 1906 the Act was allowed to lapse by Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman's Government. But the Irish Government had other, though less efficient, powers for dealing with unauthorised bodies who sought to arm themselves. If the ordinary excise duty on carrying a gun had been enforced a complete register of firearms would have been obtained, and the poorer members of the community might have found difficulty in paying the license duty (see the Gun License Act, 1870 (33 & 34 Vict. c. 57)). It seems that no attempt was made to enforce this law, the only reason alleged being that the people concerned would have refused to take out the license and pay the duty.

The Explosive Substances Act, 1883 (46 & 47 Vict. c. 83), which applies to the whole of the United Kingdom, gives drastic powers for dealing with explosives, and it may be assumed that the term "explosive" would include stores of ammunition as well as high explosives. Under that Act if any person has in his possession any explosive substance he is guilty of felony and liable on conviction to 14 years penal servitude, unless he can show that he was in possession thereof for a lawful object (sect. 4). Accessories are liable to a like punishment. For the purpose of discovering stores of explosives, the Attorney General, if he has reasonable ground for believing that the Act has been disobeyed, may order an inquiry at which witnesses may be examined on oath, although no person is charged with any crime under the Act.

The Unlawful Drilling Act, 1819 (60 Geo. 3. c. 1), is an Act "to prevent the training of persons to the use of Arms, and to the practice of Military Evolutions and Exercise." It prohibits drilling and military exercises unless authorised by the Crown, the lieutenant, or two county justices, and authorises any justice or peace officer to disperse any meeting unauthorised for drilling, and to arrest the persons attending it. As regards procedure, the Criminal Law and Procedure (Ireland) Act, 1887 (50 & 51 Vict. c. 20), besides providing for special jury trials in

* Commonly known as the Arms Act.

proclaimed districts, empowers the Lord Lieutenant by proclamation to prohibit or suppress "dangerous associations" and defines as dangerous any association which (*inter alia*) interferes with the administration of the law or disturbs the maintenance of law and order.

It may be noted too that the old Acts, known as the Whiteboy Acts, some of which were passed by the Irish Parliament, appear to be still in force. These Acts give the Government extensive powers for dealing with riotous or unlawful assemblies.

The Irish Government have also the ordinary common law powers for proceeding against persons who publish seditious libels, or engage in seditious conspiracies. But legal powers are of no avail unless the Government make up their minds to put them into execution, and can rely on juries and magistrates to do their duty when prosecutions are supported by adequate evidence.

War broke out on the 4th August, 1914, and on the 8th August the Defence of the Realm Act, 1914 (4 & 5 Geo. 5, c. 29), was passed. This Act authorised His Majesty in Council to issue Regulations, during the continuance of the war, "for securing the public safety and the defence of the realm," and instituted trial by Court Martial for serious offences against the Regulations. Under these provisions there appeared to be ample powers for dealing with any manifestations of sedition or rebellion. But as regards Ireland, the teeth of this enactment were drawn by the Defence of the Realm Amendment Act, 1915 (5 Geo. 5, c. 34), which was passed on the 18th March, 1915. That Act provided that any British subject (not being a person subject to military law) charged with an offence under the Defence of the Realm Acts might claim to be tried by a jury in a civil court, instead of by court martial. Power was given to His Majesty to suspend the operation of this provision "in the event of invasion or other special military emergency." But it certainly would have been difficult to have justified the exercise of this suspensory power in Ireland before any actual outbreak in arms had occurred. It was impossible, as stated by Mr. Birrell and other witnesses, to get a conviction, in any case tried by a jury, for an offence against law and order however strong the evidence for the Crown might be. The power of internment conferred by the regulations applied primarily to foreigners, and only extended to British subjects when "hostile association" could be established. Therefore, however serious an offence might be, the only remedy was a prosecution before a court of summary jurisdiction where six months' imprisonment was the maximum punishment that could be imposed, and when a case was tried before justices there was no certainty that the decision would be in accordance with the evidence.

CAUSES OF THE OUTBREAK.

In dealing with the series of events which led up to the outbreak of the 24th April, 1916, and in endeavouring to elucidate the causes of the rebellion in Ireland, the fact should be borne in mind that there is always a section of opinion in that country bitterly opposed to the British connection, and that in times of excitement this section can impose its sentiments on largely increased numbers of the people. As Mr. Birrell described it: "The spirit of what to-day is called Sinn Feinism is mainly composed of the old hatred and distrust of the British connection, always noticeable in all classes, and in all places, varying in degree, and finding different ways of expression, but always *there* as the background of Irish politics and character."

The incidents which preceded the rising in April, 1916, are fully detailed in the evidence of the witnesses, but may be summarised as follows:—In the winter of 1913, while industrial strikes were in progress in Dublin, an armed force of working men, officially called the Citizen Army, was first created. As this force was partly armed, and the Dublin Metropolitan Police are an unarmed force, the employers were in some cases compelled to arm their carters to resist intimidation by the strikers. This lawless display of force should have been a warning against the recent policy of permitting the indiscriminate arming of civilians in Ireland in times of turbulence and faction. In periods of peace it may be desirable in an orderly community to disregard some seditious utterances as mere vapouring, but when a country is engaged in a serious struggle sedition alters its aspect and becomes treason, dangerous to the community, and should promptly be suppressed. As stated by Sir David Harrel in his evidence, the Irish people "are easily led, and it is therefore the more incumbent on Government to nip lawlessness and disorder in the bud. Neglect in this respect has invariably led to things getting out of hand, with the result that strong repressive measures become necessary, and much hardship is imposed upon misled, but perhaps comparatively inoffensive people."

On the 13th December, 1913, in view of information that arms were entering the province of Ulster from foreign countries, including Germany, a Proclamation was issued under the Customs Consolidation Act, 1876, prohibiting the importation of arms into Ireland. In defiance of this, large quantities of arms were surreptitiously imported by night at Larne and other places, in April, 1914. Before this date other similar consignments had been seized and confiscated. It has been stated that as a matter of policy it was decided by the Government not to take proceedings against those responsible for this breach of the law. The validity of the Proclamation was afterwards questioned in an action brought by a gunsmith of Ulster against the Customs authorities, but on the 15th June, 1914, a majority of an Irish Court upheld its validity. Notwithstanding this decision the Irish Government decided to withdraw the Proclamation, and the withdrawal, though decided on before the outbreak of the War, was publicly notified on the 5th August, 1914, the day after War broke out.

On Sunday, the 26th July, 1914, a large consignment of arms and ammunition from abroad was landed at Howth, near Dublin, for the use of the Irish National Volunteers, who will be hereafter described. Members of that force overpowered the Customs Officers and landed and distributed the arms. An attempt was made by the Dublin Metropolitan Police acting under orders of Mr. W. V. Harrel, the Assistant Commissioner, to enforce the Proclamation by seizure. After trying fruitlessly to obtain the co-operation of a detachment of the Royal Irish Constabulary he called in a military force to assist him, and a few arms were taken, but most of the Volunteers retired with the weapons before the arrival of the military. Whilst the troops were returning to barracks they were attacked by a mob and an unfortunate incident occurred by which some members of the public lost their lives through shots from the soldiers in Bachelors Walk. Mr. Harrel was immediately suspended by the Chief Secretary pending further investigation. A Royal Commission was appointed to enquire into this matter, and sat from the 6th to the 11th August, 1914. In their report which was submitted to Your Majesty, Mr. Harrel was censured by the Commission for his conduct in invoking the assistance of the troops, and he resigned his position. The Chief Commissioner—Sir John Ross, of Bladensburg, had previously resigned his position after the order of temporary suspension had been issued against Mr. Harrel. The resignation of Mr. Harrel was looked upon by the public in Dublin as tantamount to dismissal, and while it appears that it had no effect on the loyalty of the Dublin Metropolitan Police, it tended to discourage the officers of that body from initiative in enforcing the law. Further, there can be no doubt that his dismissal tended to weaken the authority of the police, as it gave rise to the opinion amongst the more ignorant classes that in any case of disorder the Government might not support their action.

In spite of the breach of the Proclamation of December, 1913, in the landing of arms at Howth, the Irish Government decided (as in the case of the arms imported at Larne) to take no action, and to institute no prosecution, and on the 5th August, as has been above stated, the restriction upon the importation of arms into Ireland was removed.

From the evidence given before the Royal Commission it is clear that the insurrection was caused by two bodies of men allied together for this purpose and known as the Irish Volunteers and the Citizen Army. It is now a matter of common notoriety that the Irish Volunteers have been in communication with the authorities in Germany and were for a long time known to be supplied with money through Irish American societies. This was so stated in public by Mr. John McNeill on the 8th November, 1914. It was suspected long before the outbreak that some of the money came from German sources.

The following facts show what was known of the origin and development of these two bodies and the action taken by the Irish Government in dealing with their activities:—

The Irish National Volunteers owed their origin to a meeting at Dublin in November, 1913, of twelve men who came together to discuss the formation of an Irish Volunteer Army. The founders of the force included John McNeill, Bulmer Hobson, F. H. Pearse and The O'Rahilly. After the decision to enrol volunteers had been taken, a meeting attended by some thousands of people was held in Dublin and the movement took shape.* It was started quite independently of any Irish Political Party by men strongly opposed to any political connection of Ireland with England. By June, 1914, 65,000 men were reported to have been enrolled, and Mr. Redmond in that month succeeded in securing the addition of enough members to the Committee to secure to himself and his party the control of the movements of the body, to the great dissatisfaction of the original Founders. On the eve of the Prime Minister's meeting in Dublin on the 25th September, 1914—where Mr. Redmond spoke strongly in favour of recruiting—a manifesto was issued attacking Mr. Redmond's attitude. This was signed by McNeill and six others (afterwards involved in the Rebellion) and concluded by regretting that Sir Roger Casement's absence prevented his being a signatory. On September 30th this party disassociated themselves from the Irish National Volunteers and formed a new Force under the name of the Irish Volunteers. By the end of October the force enrolled numbered over 13,000 including 2,000 in Dublin. Of these, more than 8,000 were known to be actively engaged in drilling at the end of 1914, and to be in possession of over 1,400 rifles.

It was of paramount importance that after the outbreak of the present war no opportunity should have been given for the drilling and arming of any body of men known to be of seditious tendency, and no other consideration should have interfered with the enforcing of this duty. After the war broke out there was a considerable wave of feeling in Ireland in favour of the Allies. Reservists joining the Colours were greeted with enthusiasm, and recruiting was successful. It was owing to the activities of the leaders of the Sinn Fein movement that the forces of disloyalty gradually and steadily increased, and undermined the initial sentiment of patriotism.

The words "Sinn Fein" (ourselves alone) rather describe a movement than an association, and the principal efforts of those connected with the movement before the outbreak of the war had been active opposition to any recruiting of Irishmen for the British Army and Navy, and a passive opposition to all Irish parliamentary parties. From the fact that some leaders of the Sinn Fein movement also led the Irish Volunteers, the latter have frequently been called the Sinn Fein Volunteers, and the two expressions from the end of 1914 are synonymous. Between the 5th August, 1914, and the 5th December, 1914, there was no law in force prohibiting the importation of arms into Ireland. Certain warrants had been issued by the Lord Lieutenant, authorising the police to seize

* Secret history of the Irish Volunteers, by The O'Rahilly.

arms, but on the 5th December, an amendment of the Regulations under the Defence of the Realm Act empowered the police to seize arms and explosives which might be landed on the coast, an exception being made in favour of sporting shot guns, which was, however, cancelled on the 5th February, 1915. Nevertheless arms and explosives continued to be smuggled into Ireland. A flood of seditious literature was disseminated by the leaders of the Irish Volunteer Party early in the war, and certain newspapers were suppressed, but according to the statement of the Under-Secretary for Ireland, action against the seditious Press was not very consistently taken, and prominent members of the Irish Parliamentary Party were strongly against newspaper suppression.

By the end of March, 1915, the Irish Volunteers do not appear to have increased much in numbers although they had acquired more arms. On March 16th, 1915, the Defence of the Realm Act, Number 2, was passed, by which any British subject could claim the right to trial by jury for an offence against the Defence of the Realm regulations, and this Act to a great extent hampered the Irish Executive in dealing with cases of sedition in Ireland. Insufficient attention appears to have been paid to the state of affairs in Ireland in both Houses of Parliament.

Throughout the whole of the remainder of the year 1915 the Irish Volunteer Party were active in their efforts to encourage sedition. Seditious papers were published, pamphlets of a violent tone issued and circulated, paid organisers were sent throughout the country to enrol and drill volunteer recruits, and the leaders themselves were active in attending anti-recruiting meetings at which disloyal speeches were openly made. A considerable number of the younger members of the priesthood in certain districts joined in the movement and schoolmasters who were followers of the Sinn Fein movement disseminated treason amongst the younger people through the medium of the Irish language.

Action was taken during this period against seditious newspapers, and against certain paid organisers of the Irish Volunteer Party, but this course was strongly opposed by members of the Irish Parliamentary Party, and the Nationalist press. Major Price in his evidence says:—

“ One unfortunate thing which hindered us a good deal was the attitude of the official Nationalist Party and their press. Whenever General Friend did anything strong in the way of suppressing or deporting these men (the organisers) from Ireland, they at once deprecated it, and said it was a monstrous thing to turn a man out of Ireland.”

Irishmen no doubt appreciate the maintenance of order, but they appear to have an inveterate prejudice against the punishment of disorder.

So seditious had the country become during 1915, that juries in Dublin, and magistrates in various parts of the country—through fear or favour—could not be trusted to give decisions in accordance with the evidence. The only tribunals which could be relied upon at this time were those presided over by resident magistrates in Dublin or Belfast, who had no power to impose a greater sentence than six months' hard labour.

The question of the application of compulsory service gave a great stimulus to the Irish Volunteer movement in the autumn of 1915, and shortly before the recent outbreak the number of Irish Volunteers was estimated by the police authorities to be about 15,000, armed with over 1,800 rifles and about the same number of shot guns and pistols.

During the greater part of this period the Citizen Army remained distinct from the Irish Volunteers. The movement which led to the formation of the former body, composed chiefly of Dublin workmen, was to a large extent inspired by anarchist sentiment based on Irish discontent. The leader was James Connolly, who is described as a man of great energy and ability. By the month of November, 1915, it was known that the two bodies were acting in combination in Dublin.

In the newspaper “The Workers' Republic” edited by James Connolly the following passage occurs:—

“ The Irish Citizen Army was the first publicly organised armed citizen force south of the Boyne. Its constitution pledged and still pledges its members to work for an Irish Republic and for the emancipation of labour.”

Throughout the whole of this year Ireland was in a state of great prosperity so that Irish discontent could hardly be attributed to economic conditions, except that the housing conditions of the working classes in the City of Dublin might have accounted for an underlying sense of dissatisfaction with existing authority.

In the meantime the volunteers were steadily drilled and practised military manoeuvres by day and night. Ambulance classes were formed in imitation of a similar organisation in Ulster formed by the Ulster Volunteers. In Dublin the Irish Volunteers held officers' training schools and carried out night attacks, and some manoeuvres took place in the middle of the city and in the neighbourhood of the Castle.

During this period the National or Redmondite Volunteers had sunk into almost complete stagnation and towards the close of the year 1915 the largest armed and drilled force in the provinces of Leinster, Munster, and Connaught—excluding soldiers—were the Irish Volunteers.

In a letter intercepted by the Censor in the post on the 24th March, 1916, and believed to have been written by one of the teaching staff of St. Mary's College, Rathmines, to a friend in America, the following extract appears and is of interest as an indication of the spirit that was abroad in disloyal sections of the community :—

"On St. Patrick's Day there was a lot of people put into prison under the Defence of the Realm Act. There was a rumour that they intended to seize the arms of the Volunteers. The Police raided a lot of places but only got one fire-arm in a House and gave up the job. The Castle is watching them closely, but is afraid to do anything against them. There was a march in the streets of Dublin right through the City in front of the Foreign College of Trinity and before the Parliament House. The Volunteers were all armed with Rifles. Eoin McNeill was present and they saluted him as they marched by, and all this under the nose of the Castle. It is a dangerous thing to do, but the Volunteers do not care. They are getting stronger every day. Many efforts are being made for it is known now that they are our only hope since they put conscription down sometime ago. Redmond is done for. Whoever wins the War this Country will be wronged and plundered, but the people of Ireland are not disposed of yet. Their spirit is always improving and growing more Irish. One thing is clear if not others. An end is being put to the rule and insolence of the 'Peeler.' They are not nearly so arrogant as they used to be. I hope to God we may see you in Ireland when you have finished your time over there. We want the like of you to strike a blow at John Bull. Easter will soon be over then there will be the Summer coming on. May and June will pass by—not very hot as yet—and then — you know as well as I do, and no doubt much better."

Before turning to the events of the present year it is desirable to refer to the confidential reports of the Inspector-General of the Royal Irish Constabulary and of the Chief Commissioner of the Dublin Metropolitan Police, to show that even before the outbreak of war and during the war, full knowledge of the existing state of affairs was supplied to the Under-Secretary, and through him to the Chief Secretary. On the 15th June, 1914, a report was submitted from the office of the Inspector-General in which it was stated :—

"In Ireland the training and drilling to the use of arms of a great part of the male population is a new departure which is bound in the not distant future to alter all the existing conditions of life. Obedience to the law has never been a prominent characteristic of the people. In times of passion or excitement the law has only been maintained by force, and this has been rendered practicable owing to the want of cohesion among the crowds hostile to the police. If the people became armed and drilled effective police control will vanish. Events are moving. Each county will soon have a trained army far outnumbering the police, and those who control the volunteers will be in a position to dictate to what extent the law of the land may be carried into effect."

As early as the 7th September, 1914, the Dublin Metropolitan Police were warning the Government of the danger to be expected within Dublin itself. On that date the following statement was made to the Government :—

"There is no doubt that so far as Dublin is concerned the majority of the Irish National Volunteers would follow the lead of the extreme section, and hints have been given that they are not without hope of being able to assume and establish control of the Government of Ireland before the present difficulties are over and that they may attempt some escapade before long."

On the 26th October, 1914, the Detective Department of the Dublin Metropolitan Police submitted to the Under-Secretary notes of the speeches made by the Irish Volunteers at their first Annual Convention. The demonstrators had marched to the meeting nearly 1,000 strong, 230 of their number armed with rifles and 20 of the National Boys' Scouts similarly equipped. Speeches of the most inflammatory and revolutionary character were delivered. The leaders predicted rebellion and the shedding of blood "in the great fight of Ireland against the British Empire."

These documents were seen by the Chief Secretary, but he wrote no comment on their contents, and no proceedings were taken.

From the commencement the Dublin Metropolitan Police were in all respects as diligent as the Royal Irish Constabulary in forwarding to the Government regular information as to the conduct and progress of the hostile organisations within their jurisdiction.

In the Annual Report of the Inspector-General, delivered at the end of the year 1914 the following words occur :— "In the personnel of the Committee, in its declaration of policy, in the utterances of its leading representatives in the Press, and at public meetings, in its opposition to the efforts of Mr. Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party to bring Ireland into line at the present national crisis, and in its crusade against enlistment in the Army, the Irish Volunteer organisation has shown itself to be disloyal, seditious, and revolutionary, if the means and opportunity were at hand."

On the 12th February, 1915, a further report was submitted, in which it was stated that at certain meetings of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Tyrone members were reminded of the opportunity afforded by the present crisis to strike a blow for the independence of Ireland, and they were promised arms and ammunition when the time arrived.

At certain places in Co. Wexford after the promulgation of military orders under the Defence of the Realm Act for the action of the inhabitants in the event of an invasion, counter notices were placarded calling on the people to disobey the orders issued, and to welcome the German troops as friends.

In a report submitted on the 13th July, 1915, it was stated that information had been received from a reliable source that a sum of 3,000 dollars had been recently sent from America to the Council of the Irish Volunteers.

In a report submitted on the 14th September, 1915, the following passage occurs:—

“According to the information confidentially obtained, communications are passing between the leaders of the Clan-na-Gael in America and the Sinn Fein in Ireland, and money has been sent over to the latter to help them in a campaign of disloyalty. As the leaders of the Irish Volunteers apparently aim at National independence, the force bears resemblance to the old Fenian movement, but unlike the latter is ready to drill and arm its members and is not regarded as a secret society. As already reported, according to the confidential information, at a meeting of the Council of Irish Volunteers held in Dublin on the 30th May, 1915, Professor McNeill in the chair, a resolution in favour of the Irish Volunteers declaring themselves in favour of immediate insurrection, proposed by Bulmer Hobson, was only defeated by the casting vote of Professor McNeill.”

A report dated the 13th November, 1915, contained the following statement:—

“This force is disloyal and bitterly Anti-British and is daily improving its organisation. Some drill is practised but its activities are mainly directed to promoting sedition and hindering recruitment for the Army and it is now pledged to resist Conscription with arms. According to information from a reliable source the Sinn Feiners have already planned a rising in the event of Conscription, and as this is perhaps the one object in which they would find many Redmondites in agreement with them, they might give a serious amount of trouble.”

On the 14th December, 1915, a report was submitted that:—

“The Irish Volunteers were very active during the month and gained 1,300 new members. Lieutenant O’Leary, V.C., was hooted and insulted by a party of volunteers route marching. A party of 800 held military manoeuvres at Artane, Co. Dublin. The liberty of action at present enjoyed by the openly disloyal and hostile Sinn Feiners is having a very undesirable effect.”

On the 29th November, 1915, a special report was delivered which deserves study. It contains the following statement:—

“It is a fact that this body of Irish Volunteers numbers 10,000 strong in the provinces with control of 1,500 rifles and possibly more, thoroughly disloyal and hostile to British Government is apparently now on the increase and I desire to point out that it might rapidly assume dimensions sufficient to cause anxiety to the military authorities. As it is in the event of an invasion, or of any important reverse to our troops in the field, the Irish Volunteer Force would seriously embarrass arrangements for home defence.”

In addition to the information contained in the above-mentioned reports of the Royal Irish Constabulary, Lord Midleton in November, 1915, had an interview with the Chief Secretary in which he strongly urged that the Irish Volunteers should be disarmed, and not permitted to parade, and he pressed for the prosecution of those responsible for seditious speeches. His warnings were entirely neglected.

On the 18th December, 1915, a letter was sent by the Under-Secretary to the Chief Secretary, of which the following passage is an extract:—

“What is Redmond up to with his comparisons between Ireland and Great Britain in the matters of Police and Crime? He knows, or should know after what Dillon wrote to him over a month ago in the enclosed “confidential” letter and repeated verbally on the 3rd inst. The present situation in Ireland is most serious and menacing. Redmond himself sent me the other “private” enclosure on the 9th. He knows or should know that the enrolled strength of the Sinn Fein Volunteers has increased by a couple of thousand active members in the last two months to a total of some 13,500 and each group of these is a centre of revolutionary propaganda. He knows, or should know, that efforts are being made to get arms for the support of this propaganda—that the Irish Volunteers have already some 2,500 rifles, that they have their eyes on the 10,000 in the hands of the supine National Volunteers, and that they are endeavouring to supplement their rifles with shot guns, revolvers and pistols. New measures possibly requiring additional police at the ports will be required to counter these attempts, and unless in other matters we keep these revolutionaries under observation, we shall not be in a

" position to deal with the outbreak, which we hope will not occur, but which undoubtedly will follow any attempt to enforce conscription, or, even if there is no such attempt might take place as a result of continual unsuccess of the British Arms."

On the 8th January, 1915, Lord Midleton called attention in the House of Lords to the condition of Ireland. In the course of his evidence he said: "I also named four seditious newspapers, and pressed the Government to oppose them, and to say exactly what was the status of the Irish Volunteers. Lord Crewe's reply, which I hand in, minimised the increase of the organisation, expressed sanguine hopes that regulations issued by the Military authorities would practically put a stop to this dissemination of seditious newspapers, and undertook, under renewed pressure from me, that the full attention of the Irish Government and the Military authorities would be given to the status of the Volunteers." Lord Midleton further said: "On the 26th January, 1916, I had an interview with the Prime Minister by appointment, and I brought all these facts before him. The Prime Minister asked me to hand him a memorandum giving the views which had been placed into my hands, into which he undertook to make most careful examination. I sent him subsequently at his wish a memorandum, which I produce." He added: "I had an appointment with the Prime Minister for the 14th March on another very important subject, and I proposed then to lay before him the Report of this Committee" (which had met to discuss this subject) "and to give him a copy of it. Unfortunately the Prime Minister was taken ill on the 13th, and subsequently had to go to Rome. In the result the interview never took place."

Besides the warnings above mentioned Lord Midleton gave further warnings at later periods. In his evidence he stated that on February 28th he saw Sir Matthew Nathan, and on March 6th Lord Wimborne, and that:—

" All the questions which had been discussed before were brought up at this meeting, and Sir Matthew Nathan especially pressed on me that since our previous interview the movement had been developing much more seriously in Dublin. He mentioned to me the names of those who were known to the Government as the chief conspirators and urged me to read as a specimen an article by Sheehy Skeffington in the January or February number of the *Century*. I felt so strongly that Sir Matthew had not the necessary powers that I asked the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland whether I could go over and see him, and as he was in London he was good enough to arrange a meeting with me on March 6th in Arlington Street. I found Lord Wimborne took rather a more favourable view of the position in Ireland than Sir Matthew Nathan but the general trend of the conversation showed that he was most anxious to deal with some of the ringleaders, and I gathered, although he did not say so in words, he was unable to move further owing to the general attitude of the Government towards Ireland which it was impossible to disturb."

Between January, 1916 and the outbreak of the insurrection, the Irish Volunteers steadily increased in numbers and discipline. During this time they were known to be supplying themselves with quantities of arms and high explosives by theft, or otherwise, when opportunity offered. In the early months of the year the state of various parts of the country was known to be lawless. In January the heads of the Royal Irish Constabulary submitted to the Under Secretary suggestions for the amendment of the Defence of the Realm Act and Regulations. They pointed out that trial by jury had proved to be a failure and that in many parts of Ireland the magistrates could not be relied upon to enforce the existing regulations. A conference was held at the Castle to consider these recommendations early in February. Amendments of the law and prohibition of the carrying of arms by the Irish Volunteers were suggested as remedial measures in a carefully written paper of recommendations submitted to the conference. It was attended by Mr. O'Connell, Deputy Inspector-General of the Royal Irish Constabulary, the Under Secretary, General Friend, and the Solicitor-General. The only suggestion discussed was that dealing with explosives—the more serious matters were not even brought forward. Upon this point Mr. O'Connell remarked:—"It was my impression, rightly or wrongly, that they had been discussed by higher authorities."

The publication of newspapers containing seditious articles continued during the spring of 1916. A number of seditious books called "Tracts for the Times" were circulated. Major Price, of the Army Intelligence Department, informed the Commission that he had consultations with regard to this matter, but added:—"I liken myself to John the Baptist preaching in the Wilderness as to taking steps on the subject. The Civil Authorities did not think it desirable to take steps."

On St. Patrick's day, the 17th of March, there was a parade of the Irish Volunteers throughout the Provinces, under orders from their Headquarters. About 4,500 turned out, of whom 1,817 were armed. The report of the Inspector-General of the Royal Irish Constabulary, dealing with this parade, contained the following remarks:—

" There can be no doubt that the Irish Volunteer leaders are a pack of rebels who would proclaim their independence in the event of any favourable opportunity, but with their present resources and without substantial reinforcements it is difficult to imagine that they will make even a brief stand against a small body of troops. These observations, however, are made with reference to the Provinces and not to the Dublin Metropolitan area, which is the centre of the movement."

At the end of last March the Council of the Irish Volunteers assembled in Dublin, and issued a manifesto warning the public that the volunteers :—

“ Cannot submit to be disarmed, and that the raiding for arms and the attempted disarming of men, therefore, in the natural course of things can only be met by resistance and bloodshed.”

On the 7th April, 1916, public meetings of the Irish Volunteers were held for the purposes of protesting against the deportation orders and to enlist recruits. The speeches were very violent, threats being used that persons attempting to disarm the volunteers would be “ shot dead.”

The Chief Commissioner made a report to the Under Secretary, and that document shows clearly the view that Colonel Edgeworth-Johnstone took of the situation :—

“ These recruiting meetings are a very undesirable development, and are I think causing both annoyance and uneasiness amongst loyal citizens. . . . The Sinn Fein party are gaining in numbers, in equipment, in discipline, and in confidence, and I think drastic action should be taken to limit their activities. The longer this is postponed the more difficult it will be to carry out.”

This report reached the Under Secretary on the 10th April, who wrote on it “ Chief Secretary and the Lord Lieutenant to see the Chief Commissioner’s minute.” On the 12th the Chief Secretary wrote upon it, “ Requires careful consideration. Is it thought practicable to undertake a policy of disarmament, and, if so, within what limits, if any, can such a policy be circumscribed?” Upon the same day the Lord Lieutenant wrote upon it, “ This is a difficult point : could the disarming be satisfactorily effected?”

No answer to the minute was returned to the Royal Irish Constabulary, and the file did not find its way back to the Inspector General until the 24th May.

For some months before the rising, a newspaper campaign was carried on suggesting that if an attempt were made by the Government to disarm the Irish Volunteers, it could only arise from the deliberate intention of Englishmen to provoke disorder and bloodshed.

There is no doubt that these articles were intended to intimidate the Irish Government, and to prevent their taking active repressive measures.

On the 18th April news reached Dublin Castle that a ship had left Germany for Ireland on April 12th, accompanied by two German submarines, but the news was accompanied by a caution as to its accuracy. The statement added that the ship was due to arrive on the 21st, and that a rising was timed for Easter Eve. On the 19th April a special meeting of the Dublin Corporation was held at the Mansion House to discuss the police rate. Alderman Thomas Kelly, in the course of a speech attacking Mr. Justice Kenny (who had alluded at the opening of his Commission to the state of disorder in Dublin and had urged military action) made a statement to the effect that he had received that morning from the Editor of “ New Ireland ” a circular which he would read. It was from a man named Little, New Ireland Office, 13, Fleet Street, Dublin, 16th April, 1916 :—

“ Sir,—The gravity of the present situation in Ireland compels me to invite your serious attention to the enclosed. It is a copy of portion of a document recently addressed to, and on the files in, Dublin Castle. In view of the deliberate intention here revealed on the part of the Government to cause bloodshed in Ireland by an attack on the Irish Volunteers—a body formed openly in pre-war times—in a manner certain to provoke armed resistance, I appeal to you to use your influence, public and private, in whatever manner you may consider would best benefit this country. The cipher from which this document is copied does not indicate punctuation or capitals.

“ The following precautionary measures have been sanctioned by the Irish Office on the recommendation of the General Officer Commanding the Forces in Ireland. All preparations will be made to put these measures in force immediately on receipt of an Order issued from the Chief Secretary’s Office, Dublin Castle, and signed by the Under Secretary and the General Officer commanding the Forces in Ireland. First, the following persons to be placed under arrest :—All members of the Sinn Fein National Council, the Central Executive Irish Sinn Fein Volunteers, General Council Irish Sinn Fein Volunteers, County Board Irish Sinn Fein Volunteers, Executive Committee National Volunteers, Coisde Gnata Committee Gaelic League. See list A 3 and 4 and supplementary list A 2 Dublin Metropolitan Police and Royal Irish Constabulary forces in Dublin City will be confined to barracks under the direction of the Competent Military Authority. An order will be issued to inhabitants of city to remain in their houses until such time as the Competent Military authority may otherwise direct or permit. Pickets chosen from units of Territorial Forces will be placed at all points marked on maps 3 and 4. Accompanying mounted patrols will continuously visit all points and report every hour. The following premises will be occupied by adequate forces, and all necessary measures used without need of reference to headquarters. First, premises known as Liberty Hall, Beresford Place ; No. 6, Harcourt Street, Sinn Fein Building ; No. 2, Dawson Street, Headquarters, Volunteers ; No. 12, D’Olier Street, ‘ Nationality Office ’ ; No. 25, Rutland Square, Gaelic League Office ; 41, Rutland Square, Foresters’ Hall ; Sinn Fein Volunteer premises in city ; all National Volunteer premises in the city ; Trades Council premises, Capel Street ; Surrey House, Leinster Road, Rathmines. The following

"premises will be isolated, and all communications to or from prevented:—Premises known as Archbishop's House, Drumcondra, Mansion House, Dawson Street; No. 40, Herbert Park; Larkfield, Kimmage Road, Woodtown Park, Ballyboden; Saint Enda's College, Hermitage, Rathfarnham; and in addition premises in list 5D, see maps 3 and 4."

Alderman Kelly, in continuing, said that the document was evidently genuine, and that he had done a public service in drawing attention to it, in order to prevent these military operations being carried on in a city which he declared was under God the most peaceable in Europe.

This document was an entire fabrication. Copies of it found since the outbreak are shown by identification of type to have been printed at Liberty Hall, the headquarters of the Citizen Army. It is not known who was the author of this invention, or whether Mr. Little was in any way responsible for it. Many copies of this forged document were printed and distributed, and it was widely considered by the people to be genuine, and no doubt led to the belief by the members of the Irish Volunteers and Citizen Army that they would shortly be disarmed. This undoubtedly became one of the proximate causes of the outbreak.

On the 22nd April, 1916, the news of the capture of the German ship, and of the arrest of a man believed to be Sir Roger Casement, was published. The "Irish Volunteer" newspaper announced in its issue of that day under the title of Headquarters' Bulletin:—

"Arrangements are now nearing completion in all the more important brigade areas for the holding of a very interesting series of manoeuvres at Easter. In some instances the arrangements contemplate a one or two day bivouac. As for Easter, the Dublin programme may well stand as a model for other areas."

Reference was also made to a more elaborate series of manoeuvres at Whitsuntide.

It is clear that the leaders of the movement expected the arrival of the ship, since emissaries of the Irish Volunteers were sent to meet it. The vessel, however, and Sir Roger Casement, appear to have arrived a little sooner than was expected.

On the news of the capture of the ship orders were given at the Headquarters of the Irish Volunteers cancelling throughout all Ireland the arrangements for the following day—Sunday. The order was signed "McNeill, Chief of Staff." This appeared in the early evening papers of Saturday, the 22nd April.

In the evening of the 22nd it was known to the authorities that the man arrested was Sir Roger Casement. A conference was held at Dublin Castle on the same evening. The abandonment of the parade of the Volunteers for Sunday was then known. No movements of the Volunteers took place on that day. A report was received on Sunday afternoon that there had been a robbery under arms at about 8 o'clock a.m. of 250 lbs. of gelignite from quarries a few miles south-west of Dublin and that it was believed the stolen material, or part of it, had been taken to Liberty Hall. Conferences held during Sunday, the 23rd April, at the Castle are fully detailed in the evidence of Lord Wimborne, Sir Matthew Nathan and other witnesses. It was eventually decided that the proper course was to arrest all the leaders of the movement, there being by this time clear evidence of their "hostile association," but it was agreed that before this could be safely done military preparations sufficient to overawe armed opposition should be secured.

Early in the morning of the 24th April the Chief Secretary's concurrence with the proposed arrest and internment in England of the hostile leaders was asked for and obtained, but before any further effective steps could be taken the insurrection had broken out, and by noon many portions of the City of Dublin had been simultaneously occupied by rebellious armed forces.

There is no doubt that the outbreak had been carefully planned beforehand. A pocket-book discovered upon one of the rebels who took part in the rising in Wexford contained a list of the places actually seized in Dublin when the outbreak occurred.

CONCLUSIONS.

It is outside the scope of Your Majesty's instructions to us to enquire how far the policy of the Irish Executive was adopted by the Cabinet as a whole, or to attach responsibility to any but the Civil and Military Executive in Ireland; but the general conclusion that we draw from the evidence before us is that the main cause of the rebellion appears to be that lawlessness was allowed to grow up unchecked, and that Ireland for several years past has been administered on the principle that it was safer and more expedient to leave law in abeyance if collision with any faction of the Irish people could thereby be avoided.

Such a policy is the negation of that cardinal rule of Government which demands that the enforcement of law and the preservation of order should always be independent of political expediency.

We consider that the importation of large quantities of arms into Ireland after the lapse of the Arms Act, and the toleration of drilling by large bodies of men first in Ulster, and then in other districts of Ireland created conditions which rendered possible the recent troubles in Dublin and elsewhere.

It appears to us that reluctance was shown by the Irish Government to repress by prosecution written and spoken seditious utterances, and to suppress the drilling and manœuvring of armed forces known to be under the control of men who were openly declaring their hostility to Your Majesty's Government and their readiness to welcome and assist Your Majesty's enemies.

This reluctance was largely prompted by the pressure brought to bear by the Parliamentary representatives of the Irish people, and in Ireland itself there developed a widespread belief that no repressive measures would be undertaken by the Government against sedition. This led to a rapid increase of preparations for insurrection and was the immediate cause of the recent outbreak.

We are of opinion that from the commencement of the present war all seditious utterances and publications should have been firmly suppressed at the outset, and if juries or magistrates were found unwilling to enforce this policy further powers should have been invoked under the existing Acts for the Defence of the Realm.

We are also of opinion that on the outbreak of war all drilling and manœuvring by unrecognised bodies of men, whether armed or unarmed, should have been strictly prohibited, and that as soon as it became known to the Irish Government that the Irish Volunteers and the Citizen Army were under the control of men prepared to assist Your Majesty's enemies if the opportunity should be offered to them, all drilling and open carrying of arms by these bodies of men should have been forcibly suppressed.

It does not appear to be disputed that the authorities in the spring of 1916, while believing that the seditious bodies would not venture unaided to break into insurrection, were convinced that they were prepared to assist a German landing.

We are further of opinion that at the risk of a collision early steps should have been taken to arrest and prosecute leaders and organisers of sedition.

For the reasons before given, we do not think that any responsibility rests upon the Lord Lieutenant. He was appointed in February, 1915, and was in no way answerable for the policy of the Government.

We are, however, of the opinion that the Chief Secretary as the administrative head of Your Majesty's Government in Ireland is primarily responsible for the situation that was allowed to arise and the outbreak that occurred.

Sir Matthew Nathan assumed office as Under Secretary to the Irish Government in September, 1914, only. In our view he carried out with the utmost loyalty the policy of the Government, and of his immediate superior the Chief Secretary, but we consider that he did not sufficiently impress upon the Chief Secretary during the latter's prolonged absences from Dublin the necessity for more active measures to remedy the situation in Ireland which on December 18th last in a letter to the Chief Secretary he described as "most serious and menacing."

We are satisfied that Sir Neville Chamberlain, the Inspector-General of the Royal Irish Constabulary, and Colonel Edgeworth-Johnstone, the Chief Commissioner of the Dublin Metropolitan Police, required their subordinates to furnish, and did receive from their subordinates, full and exact reports as to the nature, progress and aims of the various armed associations in Ireland. From these sources the Government had abundant material on which they could have acted many months before the leaders themselves contemplated any actual rising.

For the conduct, zeal and loyalty of the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Dublin Metropolitan Police we have nothing but praise.

We do not attach any responsibility to the Military authorities in Ireland for the rebellion or its results. As long as Ireland was under civil government these authorities had nothing to do with the suppression of sedition. Their duties were confined to securing efficiency in their own ranks and to the promotion of recruiting, and they could only aid in the suppression of disorder when duly called on by the civil power. By the middle of 1915 it was obvious to the Military authorities that their efforts in favour of recruiting were being frustrated by the hostile activities of the Sinn Féin supporters, and they made representations to the Government to that effect. The general danger of the situation was clearly pointed out to the Irish Government by the Military authorities, on their own initiative, in February last, but the warning fell on unheeding ears.

In conclusion, we desire to place on record our high appreciation of the services rendered with ability and energy by our Honorary Secretary. For several months Mr. Grimwood Mears gave his services voluntarily to the Government in their investigation into cases of alleged

German atrocities, and subsequently served as joint Honorary Secretary to the Committee on alleged German outrages, generally known as Lord Bryce's Committee. The experience thus gained by him has been of great advantage to Your Majesty's Commissioners.

We offer our cordial thanks to the Secretary of the Commission for the assistance he has given us in the performance of our task.

All which we humbly submit and report for Your Majesty's gracious consideration.

(Signed) HARDINGE OF PENSHURST,
 MONTAGUE SHEARMAN,
 MACKENZIE DALZELL CHALMERS.

E. GRIMWOOD MEARS,

Secretary.

June 26th, 1916.
