

SATURDAY. MAY 20, 1916. *Kilkenny People*

THE OLD JOHN DILLON

"Whom we have loved so long and lost awhile."

ANCIENT FIRE RENEWED.

In the House of Commons on Thursday of last week, Mr. Dillon moved the following resolution : — .

That in the interest of peace and good government in Ireland, it is vitally important that the Government should make immediately a full statement of their intentions as to the continuance of executions in that country carried out as a result of secret military trials, and as to the continuance of martial law, military rule, and the searches and wholesale arrests now going on in various districts of the country.

He said—I drafted this resolution with the object, if possible, of confining the discussion to the narrow though important issue of the military executions in Ireland and the continuance and administration of martial law in that country. I will endeavour to confine any remarks to these two points. I must, of course, say that it will be necessary to make some reference to the conduct of the insurgents and the troops in order to make out my case. First of all I desire to refer to the question which I put to the Prime Minister as a justification for the request I made for permission to move the adjournment of the House. I asked the Prime Minister first of all whether he would give a pledge that the executions should stop, and that he declined to give. Secondly I asked him whether he could tell whether any executions had taken place in Ireland since Monday morning, the last we had official notification of before I left there. The reply of the Prime Minister was "No, sir, as far as I know, not." On Monday twelve executions had been made public. Since then, in spite of the statement of the Prime Minister, I received word that a man named Kent, had been executed; in Fermoy, which is the first execution that has taken place outside of Dublin. The fact is one which could create a very grave shock in Ireland because it looks like a roving commission to carry these horrible executions all over the country. This, I say, was the first execution outside the city of Dublin, in a district where there have been no serious disturbances. Now today the under Secretary of state for War has announced to the house that fourteen men have been executed. What are we to believe. Is it any wonder that some of us have the gravest anxiety lest there should be several other executions held back from the knowledge of the Prime Minister, which will be brought to light. That is the comment I have to make upon the reply of the Prime Minister. The next point that I raised was this, whether any prisoners in Dublin have been shot without trial, or have been shot after trial, but without public announcement of their names; and, if so., how many. And to that the Prime Minister replied that so far as he knew the answer was in the negative. So far as he

knew, and within two minutes afterwards he stood up at the Table and admitted that three prisoners had been shot.

The Prime Minister—No, no. I pointedly, said, so far as I knew, they were not prisoners. I disclosed the whole of the information.

Mr. Dillon—That makes it infinitely worse, because they were prisoners, as I shall prove in the course of the observations I shall have to make; they were prisoners and shot in cold blood in Portobello Barracks without any trial whatsoever. My point with regard to that particular is that the Prime Minister is being kept in the dark; he is not being informed by the military authorities in Dublin of what is going on. Later on I must deal with this case of the unfortunate shooting of Mr. Sheehy Skeffington, for which I attach no responsibility whatever to Sir John Maxwell or the higher military authorities; Beyond this, how did we here in this House and the public become aware of the shooting at the Portobello Barracks. The Prime Minister was asked about it yesterday and I have his own words. He said that as soon as he had got any information of the event he telegraphed to the authorities in Dublin and he received the following reply:

“The first intimation I had of any thing of the kind, I caused a telegram to be at once sent to the General Officer Commanding, and I have received his answer this morning.” Now this is what the answer was:

“Mr. Skeffington was shot on morning of 26th April, without the knowledge of the military authorities. The matter is now under investigation. The officer concerned has been under arrest since 6th May.” Mr. Skeffington was shot on the 26th April, and the Prime Minister never heard anything about it.

Mr. Asquith—You have not quoted, my answer completely. I am speaking from memory, but I think the telegram sent to me was that the officer concerned was arrested on the 6th May, as soon as the military authorities heard what had happened.

Mr. Dillon—That was exactly what I was coming to, but I do not think that was really an important part of the answer. All Dublin was ringing with this affair for days. It came to our knowledge within two or three days after the shooting. And are we to be told— is this the excuse for what has occurred. A more lurid light on military law in Ireland could not possibly be imagined than that a man is to be shot in Portobello Barracks which must have been known to at least three hundred or four hundred military men that the whole city of Dublin knew it. His poor wife was denied all knowledge of it until her husband was lying buried in the barrack yard for three or four days; and the military authorities in Dublin turned round and say they knew nothing whatever about it until the 6th of May. Now, on the face of those facts which I shall explain more fully in a few moments, can we blame the population of Dublin if they believe, as they do believe that dozens of other men have been summarily shot in the barracks, and we are told in this House the military authorities know nothing about it? This would never have been known if Skeffington was not one of the leading citizens in Dublin and his shooting: became known to the populace. The military authorities did not know and would not have known, apparently, unless the whole people of Dublin knew it and it was raised in the House. Therefore say the horrible rumours which are current in Dublin and which are doing untold and indescribable mischief, maddening the population of Dublin, who were

your friends and loyal allies, against this insurrection last week and who are rapidly becoming embittered by the stories afloat and these executions. I say the facts of this disclose a most serious state of things we take the next answer given by the

On Friday last, a son of my own, a boy of 17½ years of age, went to the military officer in Dublin to get a pass to go to Kingstown. He happens to be a lad who asked my own permission to allow him to join the British army on his 17th birthday and I gave him permission to join when he was 18. He will never join it now, and there are tens of thousands like him in Ireland. No one who has studied in the college where he studied is wanted in the army. He was asked his name, and the college he had studied at and the British Officer in command grossly insulted him and refused the permit. He bore a name that was suspect, and please God he will never trouble the British army. I do not put that forward for a moment as a personal grievance, because it is nothing of the kind. I see some members laughing, but, my God in Heaven, suppose your sons were subjected to such treatment your own country because, after all, it is our country, although you seem to look upon it as a kind of back garden of this country, that you can trample into the dust without, any consideration at all. Dublin is at this moment full of rumour, and is any wonder. The horrors of that week in Dublin will never be understood by those who have not been there, as I have. Let me tell you this, if it had not been for the action of Mr. John. McNeill you would be fighting still, and the rebellion would have been twice as formidable and he is one of the men now in jail. He broke the back of the rebellion on the very eve of it and he kept back a very large body of men from joining. But for it, the battle would have been raging in full swing at present, and if they had only got the Telephone exchange and the Castle it might have gone on much longer.