

When I arrived home on that Easter Saturday night of 1916, at 11 Leinster avenue, North strand Rd, between 10 and 11 o'clock, to my great surprise I was told that Arthur Griffith himself had called at the house, in a motor car, some time previously close on 10 o'clock I remember my brother saying. He had left a note. The note stated (quoting from memory) "go at once to 54 Rathgar Road Arthur Griffith."

A.G. had never been at my house before. I hurried to Nelson's pillar and caught what must have been the last Terenure tram. I got off and looked for the address given me. I saw a car standing at the curb stone and just getting into it, recognized Thomas McDonagh. I said: "Hello, Tomas, where is no 54?" he said: "In there, Dr Seamus O'Kelly's." Until that moment I did not know I was going to Seamus O'Kelly's house. McDonagh said nothing more and went off. It was the last time I spoke to him. Dr O'Kelly let me in and ushered me into a room and went out. During the period I was in his house, he stayed outside, letting people in and out, but [6] taking no part in discussions. In the room I found John McNeill, Sean Fitzgibbon; Arthur Griffith, Sean T. O'Kelly, Paddy Little (now minister of posts and telegraphs), Colm Ó Lochlainn (now of the three candle press), Páidín O'Keefe (now of Dail staff), Mr. Joe Connolly of Belfast (later parliamentary secretary for Lands or agriculture please put in correct title)

Was Dr Jim Ryan (now minister of agriculture) there for a short while after I went in, leaving before others). I cannot quite remember and that is the only name I am doubtful about. This memory would clarify this small point. John McNeill was sitting at a small table with his back to the fire place, John Fitzgibbon beside him, A.G. stood most of the time with his back to the fire. The others were all sitting in a line to the right of the door, on chairs and a sofa, with the exception of Joe Connolly he was sitting close to the table, where McNeill was, but had his back turned to the table and to the rest of the company, facing a corner of the room, and with his head bent down, and so remained without a word or a stir all the time I was in the room. I took a chair quite beside him and remember looking at him curiously once or twice and finding

[7] This attitude strange the atmosphere was very tense. MacNeill seemed strangely unlike his usual self that I knew so well (I had been his very first student in U.C.D.)

This is not a present day recollection merely, I remember distinctly that night looking at him and saying to myself: "this is a different McNeill to the McNeill I have always known." The difference consisted in the excited, highly strung, almost bitter note in this voice, so different to his usual calm, collected, objective manner and voice to which I was so long accustomed. For the best part of an hour or maybe more than an hour, he and Fitzgibbon did practically all the talking. Griffith put in an occasional murmur of assent or very brief comment. The others said nothing.

I said nothing all looked oppressed, almost frightened, shall I say? By the seriousness of the situation all except A.G. who seemed almost as usual, certainly far cooler and more normal than anyone else like himself when he was very serious, thinking hard and keeping rigidly cool and very taciturn a mood that all his old friends will remember well. Fitzgibbon was talking when I came in and continued after I had sat down he was telling of his experiences in Limerick the gist of it, as far as I can summarise it now was as follows: a fortnight before he [8] had been told of what was to come off on Easter Sunday [by Pearse? McDermott? McDonagh? I cannot say now, but generally speaking by the Rising leaders] and had been told that McNeill was in it and "everybody," so he had accepted the job given him to do in Limerick. He had been there ever since then. His job was to cooperate with and assist the local leaders there in their part of the general plan the reception of the German arms which were to arrive by train from Tralee, their ferrying across the Shannon (if necessary) while the local volunteers were to pin the British garrison in Limerick in their barracks, and then send the arms on through Clare to Athenry, distributing on the way to the Clare people, who, although only weakly organized in the volunteers, could be relied on to join in a scrap against the R.I.C. so much I gathered of the general plan that night the ever growing amazement with which I listened to the gradual revelation of all this can be imagined. Fitzgibbon said he had found the greatest good will and readiness to fight among the

limerick volunteers, but was impressed the poorness of their resources in [9] Arms and ammunition, for the task assigned to them, and as far as he could see and hear, of the equipment of the country companies in the vicinity of limerick then on good Friday he began to hear of the events off the coast of Kerry I think but am not sure, that he mentioned hearing of the three men drowned at killerglin and travelling somewhere Kerry wards to investigate . Finally on Saturday morning very early, he decided to come to Dublin, went Straight to John McNeill and had been with him since the afternoon McNeill spoke a good deal too as I had a long conversation with him on Easter Monday following, about midday, it is hard for my memory to separate what I heard from him on Saturday night and what I heard from him on Monday morning, especially as the Monday conversation took place in the same room But the gist of it is clear enough namely that McNeill told how he had been left completely in the dark, only found out things gradually and by accident and realized that Sunday's all Ireland manoeuvres were to be turned into an offensive action, an insurrection;[10] how he had expostulated with the leaders how (but of this following point I am very uncertain as to which conversation with McNeill I was told it) he had agreed with them that if the British attacked he would stand in with them, of course, such having always been his position but that in the course of the day (that Saturday) hearing of the disaster off Kerry, and especially in view of the utter unpreparedness of the country as reported to him by Fitzgibbon, confirming what information he had himself he had come to the conclusion that the enterprise was madness, would mean a slaughter of unarmed men and that he felt it to be his bounden duty to try and stop it. A.G's attitude and such words as he spoke, were clearly quite in approval of the sentiments expressed by MacNeill. The row of men on the other side of the room remained silent. I cannot recall a single remark being made by any one of them. Joe

Connolly continued to sit with his back turned to us all and his head down. I remember finally A.G remarking that it was very late and that he would be off: that I would be going the same way home: "give Mr. O'Brien his orders and we will be going" he said. Then I noticed a little pile of sheets of note paper of the usual [11] small letter size on the table These were copies of the "cancelling order" as it was called, the same text as appeared next day in the Sunday independent. Fitzgibbon took three of these and gave them to me saying: "travel with these in the morning to Edenderry, to Tullamore and to Father Smith's volunteers: in Edenderry find out a man called Beatty, in Tullamore a man called Carroll, volunteer secretaries both of them, and father smith himself in the other place "What other place?" I said "Tyrrell's Pass, I think" he said "yes, Tyrrell's Pass." I knew very slightly a Fr Smith who had attended a summer course at Spiddal a few years previously and after a few exchanges with Fitzgibbon, recognized that it was the same man. I took the three copies of the order and made for the door. I stopped to talk to Sean T. O'K who was sitting nearest the door. "What is all this about, Sean?" I said.

"You see for yourself and you know as much as I do now, you see there has been a Split" he answered "What have I got to do with a split?" I said, "I am only a private soldier." "I am in the same boat" he replied "only when I came to McNeill, {James McNeill afterwards Gov-General, had written out these copies early in the day as I heard from so}

12 this evening and found that this order had already gone out to some places, it seemed to me that it would be only right that every place should get it, to prevent people in one place going out thinking that the place beside them would be going out, when they wouldn't be" "Then you think I ought to travel with this order" I said "yes, I think you ought" replied Sean. "All right" I said. This is as near as possible to being verbatim the conversation that passed between Sean T O'K and myself. It is what I remember most distinctly of the whole night and I have never let that little conversation slip from my memory although I have never written it down before.

Colin Ó Lochlainn who was sitting near Sean joined in then, but I have only the vaguest recollection of what he said. It was mostly about a journey to Kerry and back and about the men drowned in Killorglin. for the purpose of effecting a "burglary" of wireless equipment in Maurice Fitzgerald's wireless school in Caherciveen to use for communication purpose not only with German ship out afterwards during the fight as I heard (?) at the time The 3 men drowned were going to Cahersiveen too - nothing to do with meeting casement consult

calm olochlan

I went off then with Arthur Griffith it must have been about one in the morning. Dr O'Kelly let us out. Somewhere outside we picked up an outside car and drove down [13] town. Even then I remember saying stupidly to Griffith "What was intended for tomorrow night?" "a general insurrection throughout Ireland" he replied shortly. I don't remember anything else said on that silent drive Griffith was plunged in thought and I had to give up attempts at conversation. On the way home we stopped at Thompson's garage in Brunswick St (now Pearse St) near the fire Brigade station and I ordered a car for the morning. I should have said that before leaving Doctor O'Kelly's house McNeill had given me eight pounds in notes. I wish to add here that at no time had I the idea that I was present at a "meeting" while I was present at Doctor O'Kelly's house that is to say, a regular meeting with a chairman, with the right to propose or second things, or vote. The decision had been taken long before I arrived there. My impression then and immediately afterwards and ever since was that I had been sent for to be a messenger and that most of the other men present were in the same position I do not wish it to be inferred that my opinion was sought for in regard [14] to anything or that anyone then attached the slightest importance to any opinion of mine. I do not wish it to be innervred that I was on McNeill's "side" if we must talk of "side" that I was Against the rising and in sympathy with his act I was, I may say, too well drilled and disciplined a private volunteer for that. I travelled simply on the advice of a man whom I looked up to greatly at the time and who had a great influence with me namely, Sean T O'Kelly, as I have reported above. But had my company captain Fionan Ó Loingsigh been there or the company lieutenant Jack Shouldice I certainly would have gone over to either one of them and asked him to give me an order and obeyed it

[I was the last to arrive in Dr O'Kelly's house that evening. The statements of the men I have named above will show that a great many things happened and that various important personages had come and gone in that house that day and evening before I arrived]

(signed) professor hiam OBriain, M.A. university
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