

TOM CLARKE'S LETTER TO JOHN DEVOY

Taken From Recollections of an Irish Rebel by John Devoy

Tom Clarke's letters to me during that period (I have not been able to find all of them) threw an interesting light on the situation in Ireland and the hopes which the men who were executed in 1916 based on that situation.

The following letter from Clarke (who usually signed himself "T. James" when communicating with me) gave a fuller sketch of the progress of the Volunteer movement than any of the others:

May 14, 1914.

Dear Uncle,

I know with what interest you follow things in the old country and how you hanker after reliable information regarding conditions, so I am going to try and give you a "line" upon the situation here at present writing.

The country is electrified with the volunteering business - never in my recollection have I known in any former movement anything to compare with the spontaneous rush that is being made all over to get into the movement and start drill and get hold of a rifle. John Redmond & Co. were panic-stricken at what was happening, and when too late for themselves privately opened negotiations with the leading members of the Irish Volunteer Provisional Committee. These members didn't rise to the bait and still the volunteering went on at a gallop.

The Home Rule Bill will pass as it stands, but an amending bill, re Exclusion, will be introduced as a result of an understanding between the Government and the Opposition (Redmond & Co. quite ignored in this). We have known of this for some weeks, so there were more pour parlers between the

Irish Volunteer people and Redmond, Devlin & Co., to consider what should be done in the face of this new development. I believe a programme was mapped by the I.V. people and has been approved of by the other people, with the result that a "private and confidential" circular has been issued by the National Secretary of the A.O.H to allow the divisions directing all the members to join the Volunteers - join the companies that are already formed and form committees to start new companies and regiments where they don't already exist, and emphasizing the necessity of sinking all minor points and joining hands in this work with all creeds and classes of the people who are working in the movement. This circular was only sent out this week, but I saw a copy of it, and upon my word one would think it was written by an ultra Sinn Feiner.

In the same way a circular has been issued to the U.I.L branches - also "private and confidential" and on much the same lines as the other, as far as my information goes, and I get this information from a variety of sources, including a reliable "big pot" of the U.I.L. with whom I am rather intimate.

Volunteering is going on at a rapid rate in Ulster (I mean Irish Volunteering). I know this from an old friend up there named Carrick from whom I hear often; and the strange thing about it is that in some sections the Carsonites regard the Irish Volunteers with a friendly face, and in fact some of the influential ones in conversation with prominent Volunteer men say that if it comes to a scrap between them (Carsonites) and the English they know that the Irish Volunteer would fight with them and not against them. That is an extraordinary change in the attitude of the one-time Orangeman, when he even allows himself to entertain the thought of himself and the papists fighting together in any circumstance. However, seeing with

what lightning-like rapidity things are developing in various directions, one needn't be surprised at anything now.

And the change that has come over the young men of the country who are volunteering! Erect, heads up in the air, the glint in the eye, and then the talent and ability that had been latent and is now being discovered! Young fellows who had been regarded as something like wastrels now changed to energetic soldiers and absorbed in the work and taking pride that at last they feel they can do something for their country that will count. Tis good to be alive in Ireland these times.

Larkin's people for some time past have been making war on the Irish Volunteers. I think this is largely inspired by a disgruntled fellow named O'Casey. By this attitude they have antagonized the sympathy of all sections of the country and none more so than the advanced section. Liberty Hall is now a negligible quantity here.

I'd like you would let me know as soon as you can if Cousin Ric will be able to pay a visit to us. If he can't we shall want some time to negotiate employment of another man to fill the position. But from a business point of view, no one could fill the position just now like him.

The family are well and in real good health and business is splendid.

Goodbye. Trusting you keep strong and in good health, with all sorts of kind wishes to old friends.

T. JAMES.

P.S. - Since finishing my letter last night I was talking to a lady belonging to the Lady Volunteer Committee. She attended the weekly meeting last night and seemed delighted with the atmosphere of the place and the way things are progressing. Among the interesting items are the following: The London

Ladies' Sub-Committee (Mrs. Stopford Green, chairwoman) has collected £500; the Ladies' Com. here nearly the same amount.

It has been officially decided that all monies collected by the Lady Vol. Committees will be turned over to the Provisional (Men's) Committee with the expressed stipulation that this will only be used for the purchase of arms.

From different parts of the country communications came in to the Ladies' Committee expressing a desire to co-operate and asking for instructions.

Two Limerick ladies were present to get information, etc., in order to start a committee in that city. Those ladies, by the way, are nieces of the old Rebel, John Daly. Another married sister was with them who is a member of the Dublin Committee.

In connection with the discussion to adopt a badge for the Lady Volunteers, she submitted a combination bow badge - orange and green on the wings with white on the centre. Having explained the symbolical meaning of the badge as indicating one of the basic principles of the organisation, this badge was adopted unanimously. She and Mrs. Bradley were appointed as a sub-committee to devise a scheme of organisation to start an Irish Volunteer Boys' movement, this boys' movement to rest upon the same principles as the I.V. organisation.

The "married sister" referred to in the above postscript was Tom's wife; the "two Limerick ladies" were his sisters-in-law.