

THE CHANGE

By Éamonn Ceannt.

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"I think Ireland would be formidable as an armed nation." – **Wolfe Tone.**

The Irish Volunteers have come to stay. So much is clear to anyone who studies the present National situation. The Volunteers are the key to that situation. Whatever of evil faces us will only be averted by them; whatever of good will only be ensured by them. Until now this great elemental desire of the Irish as of other peoples to defend their rights by their strong right hands has been held in check by the leaders of the people. After a generation's delay the value of force in deciding our relations with England has become a practical question. For fully a generation the man who talked of guns was ranked with either the fools or the knaves. Ireland had no use for him. Under the influence of this unnatural state of affairs all the timid elements in Irish life were found at the top. For over a generation Ireland has taken her national views from men whose whole lives were bound up with the preservation of the peace. Suddenly, in a day, in an hour, the whole situation has undergone a change. Force has reappeared as a factor in Irish political life. Irish Nationalists have been challenged for a proof of their political faith and their answer is the Irish Volunteers.

Throughout all Ireland tens of thousands of young men and old men have listed in the National Army midst the plaudits of the men of peace. Old men who were drilled for '67 are enthusiastic Volunteers. Priests, parsons, and public men, are in the ranks or are proud to encourage those who are. Ireland's honour demands the maintenance of the Irish Volunteers.

It is to be hoped that men are not joining the National army from any motives but those which actuated the founders. The object of the Volunteers is to maintain and preserve the rights and liberties common to the whole people of Ireland. There is no question of

preserving merely the “legal” rights graciously permitted us by a foreign power. One of the greatest of the God-given rights which it is the boast of the Volunteers that they will maintain is the right to be drilled and armed. Who knows when we may be all called upon to defend this right? And what kind of a fight would the Irish Volunteers like to put up in case their right to drill and arm were suddenly to be challenged from any quarter. They would like to put up a fight that would make history. They would like to make the victory of their enemies a pyrrhic victory. They would not care to have it said at their wake that they died from a clout of a policeman’s baton. The only certain way to prevent such an indignity is by obtaining suitable arms.

The Irish Volunteers were founded as a peace movement. They will interfere with no man’s rights whether he be orange or green. But as soon as their own rights are challenged – and no sooner – they must make good. And they can only make good by being prepared with something more serviceable than staves in their hands. “I think Ireland would be formidable as an armed nation,” said Wolfe Tone. With all humility I say so too. To become an armed nation is then a pressing necessity. There is no difficulty in obtaining rifles. The only difficulty is to obtain the necessary money. If the Volunteers themselves give an example of self-sacrifice in this matter the monied public will not fail to subscribe. The Volunteers armed, with pistols or revolvers – failing rifles – will not be attacked in a hurry and will not go down under the batons of the police. The Volunteers unarmed, will cut a sorry figure in a fight. Even uniforms for which some foolish people are clamouring will be poor protection against the batons of the police or the bullets of a foreign soldiery.

The Irish Volunteers have come to stay. The best, the only guarantee of their permanence is the possession of arms of some kind.

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