

CHARLES KICKHAM'S NARRATIVE OF 1848

From *Four Years of Irish History: 1845-1849* by Charles Gavan Duffy. The short preface, in italics, is an excerpt from Duffy.

We have, happily, a picture of what happened at Mullinahone by a witness possessing insight and sympathy, and incapable of colouring the facts for any purpose. Charles Kickham was then a youth of eighteen, son of a prosperous shopkeeper in the village, and already on fire with a love of country which was only extinguished with his life. A few months before his death he furnished me with this striking narrative: -

When the rumour reached our village, I had an ash tree cut down on the farm of one of my uncles, and carried to a carpenter's shop to make a beginning. It was encouraging to see how readily and joyfully the carpenter and his two sons flung away the work they had in hand to prepare the tree for the sawpit. It was soon converted into roughly-dressed pike handles, one of which I requested them to finish off, while I, following the instructions given in the Nation, fashioned a wooden model of a salmon-back pikehead. There was a forge within a few yards of the carpenter's shop, where I found the blacksmith as ready and willing as his neighbours. He had steel and Swedish iron just fit for the purpose, and, cautiously shutting and fastening the door, he set to work, and a serviceable though not yet a shining blade was fixed upon the smooth handle in a wonder fully brief space of time. It was, I believe, the first pike made in that part of Tipperary since '98. While we were admiring and handling and balancing it, the forge door was burst open, and a young farmer, his coat upon his arm, and the perspiration streaming from his face, rushed in, exclaiming breathlessly, 'Smith O'Brien and Duffy are below. They are looking for you.'

This was another bewildering surprise, for I knew Duffy was in prison. We all ran to the town, and met Smith O'Brien coming towards us, followed by a small crowd. I had never before seen Mr. O'Brien, but knew him at once by his portrait. A tall gentleman

dressed in black, and having a plaid scarf tied sashwise over his shoulder, relieved me from my embarrassment by saying, with a winning smile, 'I am Mr. Dillon,' I shook hands with him, remarking that we had never before seen any of our leading patriots in that secluded place. They turned back towards the town. O'Brien seemed to me to be like a man in a dream; while Dillon looked calm and bright and earnest.

'Don't go like a rabble,' said O'Brien; and turning to me he added, reproachfully, 'Put your Club into order.'

'There are only three members of the Club here,' I replied; and there was, I thought, something peculiar in Dillon's smile as he glanced first at me and then at the little crowd.

'Ring your bell,' O'Brien said; and he seemed to brighten up when I sprang to the chapel wall, which was about seven feet high, and got over it.

I was soon relieved by some young men at the ringing, and rejoined O'Brien and Dillon, with whom I found three others, whose names I learned during the day - Pat O'Donohue, James Cantwell, and James Stephens, Mr. D. P. Cunningham (now, I believe, of the *New York Tablet*), and a few other youngsters. One Mr. J. D. Wright, a Protestant, and then a student of T.C.D., who was a rising member of the bar in America, where he died in Troy, N.Y., in the year '64, was also present. O'Brien desired that as many men as possible should come in armed; and messengers were at once sent to different parts of the parish with orders to that effect. I asked Dillon who expressed great satisfaction at finding so much of a military spirit among us - to come with me some distance along the different roads, and point out the best places to erect barricades. He spoke to the farmers whom we met on the way, and urged them to procure arms. I thought I might as well get my own pike at the forge, but we found the way blocked up by a densely packed crowd of men, all crushing and struggling to get pike heads of some sort. In answer to my call, the smith (who had now as many assistants as there was room for) made his way through the crowd, and, wiping the perspiration from his face, told me sorrowfully that my pike had been stolen; that he was 'killed' trying to hammer out any sort of pikes for the crowds who were clamouring

for them, and that he 'hoped I'd excuse him.' Dillon was greatly amused by the scene at the forge. All my bundles except one, which was hidden, had also been made away with from the carpenter's. Before midnight the material for a splendid brigade had answered to the summons of Smith O'Brien. It was computed that from 6,000 men, armed with fowling-pieces, impromptu pikes, and pitchforks, were drawn up and kept at rudimentary drill that night along the streets and the roads leading to the little town of Mullinahone.

They were ready to face death beyond all question. A few barricades were thrown up, but O'Brien forbade the felling of trees across the roads without the permission of the owners of the estates upon which they grew. One poor Protestant gentle man granted this permission, but remarked ruefully that the trees on the other side of the road, which belonged to a magistrate, were spared. The boys felt the force of this appeal so strongly, that only a few of the least valuable of his trees were cut down. As the morning advanced the little army began to melt away. They saw no fighting to be done - no work of any kind; and had no idea where breakfast was to be had, except under their own roofs. There was some excitement and anxiety as to what was going to happen when O'Brien walked into the police barrack, the door of which was open as if nothing unusual was going on. There was a laugh, however, among the crowd, when a big policeman put his head out of an upper window, exclaiming, 'Yerrah! sure the time isn't come yet to surrender our arms. D'ye wait till the right time comes.' There were still some hundreds of men remaining who were near enough to their homes to have got breakfast, or who had money to buy a loaf of bread, and these escorted the leaders for a mile or so, till they were met by a party of Ballingarry men. Dillon desired the Mullinabone men to turn back. I shook hands with him and James Stevens, who sat on the same side of the car, looking cheerful and hopeful. I also shook hands with Smith O'Brien, who looked happy and dreamy smoking a cigar.