

EOIN MACNEILL'S ADDRESS TO THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE IRISH VOLUNTEERS

By Eoin MacNeill.

**Delivered at the inaugural meeting of the Irish Volunteers in
the Rotunda, Dublin, 25th November, 1913.**

We are meeting in public in order to proceed at once to the enrolment and organisation of a National Force of Volunteers. We believe that the National instinct of the people and their reasoned opinion has been steadily forming itself for some time past in favour of this undertaking, and that all that is now needed is to create a suitable opportunity, to make a beginning, and from a public meeting of the most unrestricted and representative kind, in the capital of the country, to invite all the able-bodied men of Ireland to form themselves into a united and disciplined body of freemen, prepared to secure and maintain the rights and liberties common to all the people of Ireland.

A forecast of this proceeding appeared in the Dublin Press some days ago, and what was stated in it was the truth. On the following morning the statement appeared in a different form in an English newspaper, with the addition that what was proposed was to form a Volunteer Force of Catholics in hostility to Protestants. This was a falsehood deliberately invented by its writer. We do not complain of a lie that gives us the opportunity of saying that Protestants as well as Catholics have been engaged in these preparations, and that there will be no distinction of religions in the membership of the Irish Volunteers or in their purpose.

We do not contemplate any hostility to the Volunteer movement that has already been initiated in parts of Ulster. The strength of that movement consists in men whose kinsfolk were amongst the foremost and the most resolute in winning freedom for the United States of America, in descendants of the Irish Volunteers of 1782, of the United Irishmen, of the Antrim and Down insurgents of 1798, of the Ulster

Protestants who protested in thousands against the destruction of the Irish Parliament in 1800. The more genuine and successful the local Volunteer movement in Ulster becomes, the more completely does it establish the principle that Irishmen have the right to decide and govern their own national affairs. We have nothing to fear from the existing Volunteers in Ulster, nor they from us. We gladly acknowledge the evident truth that they have opened the way for a National Volunteer movement, and we trust that the day is near when their own services to the cause of an Irish Nation will become as memorable as the services of their forefathers.

Meanwhile a use has been made, and is daily made, of the Ulster Volunteer movement that leaves the whole body of Irishmen no choice but to take a firm stand in defence of their liberties. The leaders of the Unionist Party in Great Britain and the journalists, public speakers, and election managers of that party are employing the threat of armed force to control the course of political elections and to compel, if they can, a change of Government in England with the declared object of deciding what all parties admit to be vital political issues concerning Ireland. They claim that this line of action has been successful in recent Parliamentary elections, and that they calculate by it to obtain further successes, and at the most moderate estimate to force upon this country some diminished and mutilated form of National Self-Government. This is not merely to deny our rights as a nation. If we are to have our concerns regulated by a majority of British representatives owing their position and powers to a display of armed force, no matter from what quarter that force is derived, it is plain to every man that even the modicum of civil rights left to us by the Union is taken from us, our franchise becomes a mockery, and we ourselves become the most degraded nation in Europe.

This insolent menace does not satisfy the hereditary enemies of our National Freedom. Within the past few days a political manifesto has been issued, signed most fittingly by a Castlereagh and a Beresford, calling for British Volunteers, and for money to arm and equip them to be sent into Ireland to triumph over the Irish people, and to complete their disfranchisement and enslavement.

All this is done with the approval of a party which claims to represent the majority of the English electorate and hopes to obtain supreme control of Ireland in the near future.

How far any religious issue is believed to be at stake may be judged from the fact that the Duke of Norfolk and Lord Edmund Talbot are cordially at one with the rest of their party in this Irish policy.

There may be many who are confident that this policy will be resented by the English electorate and defeated by the opposing party in British politics. On that point it is enough to say that British politics are complicated and full of chances. In any case the duty of resenting and defeating the annihilation of their political rights belongs first and foremost to the people of Ireland. In the face of such a policy a passive attitude amounts to a complete and cowardly surrender. They have rights who dare maintain them.

It is your duty to take the lead, and you need not doubt that all that is manly, liberty loving, and patriotic in Ireland will joyfully and eagerly rally to your lead.

We have now to proceed with the work of enrolment. For this purpose forms are supplied for every able-bodied man present to fill up, stating his wish to be enrolled in the Irish Volunteers, and giving his name and the district of the City or Suburbs in which he lives. The men of each district will form together a separate body of Volunteers, and enrolment officers here present will take down and keep the roll for each district, and will instruct those enrolled with regard to future proceedings. The stewards of the meeting will give any further information that may be required by men coming forward for enrolment. You are all requested to co-operate in carrying out the work of enrolment with the greatest possible order and expedition.

After enrolment each division of the Volunteers according to its district will make arrangements for a special meeting place. Those who have acted so far as a Provisional Committee will co-operate with the district divisions and assist them in the work of fully organising the divisions.