

THE VOLUNTEERS.

By Arthur Griffith.

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There are several reasons—good fat reasons—advanced against the establishment of Irish Volunteers. One is that the English people might laugh at us; another is, that guns are dangerous—they might go off; a third, that to encourage young men to dream of shooting and fighting would be to distract them from getting and hoarding. These reasons are slaves' reasons and slaves should obey them. The slave has his place in human economy, and the philanthropic humbugs who dragged him out of it and bade him regard himself as the equal of the man has long made him unhappy. His place is to be the servant of the man, to feed well, and to live for the day. Greece and Rome and ancient Ireland knew this, and gave the coward who dared not be free his place in society as the servant of the Free. However, mankind is now 2,000 years older than Plato, and therefore, according to the arithmetic 2,000 years wiser. The illuminati have discovered that war is impious and immoral—nay worse, non-progressive, for Progress is the Great Law—think how far we have progressed since Cormac MacArt wrote his Advice to a Prince—since Aristotle indited his 'Politics.' From this discovery it follows that the citizenship which demanded of the citizen readiness to expose his life and his property to destruction in defence of the State, and thereby differentiated him from the helot, was a mistaken conception.

It is urged that this movement has not been considered, that it is a limelighters' movement, that some of those at the head of it are political chameleons, ever seeking platforms whence to advertise, that it has been launched at an improper moment, that it has no plan for the arming of the people, that it is a flamboyant affair in which the rifles will be walking sticks and the cannon camans, and it is urged that even though all able-bodied Irishmen were armed and knew how

to use their arms, yet they would be impotent against England. All these objections have been made to us by real men—a distinction to be kept in mind in the days when she-men and he-women are plentiful. And to these objections we shall reply.

Whether the movement be a considered movement or a rushed movement it is not with us, and we must judge as it stands. That it is a limelight movement is not the case, so far as we know of its origin. That political chameleons are on its platforms may be so—what movement in its initial stage can keep them off. Orator Puff disappears when there is hard work to be done—he has no use for work. That it has been launched at an improper moment is possible—but then it has been launched. That it has no plan for arming the people we doubt; it would have been absurd for any practical man to associate himself with a Volunteer Movement whose projectors did not first consider how they were to arm the volunteers; that it is a flamboyant affair in which the rifles will be walking-sticks and the cannons camans is another version of the same objection. The rank-and-file may be trusted not to take part in a wooden-gun farce. So much for the objections urged to us by men who are not slavish.

It is right and necessary that such objections should be met and discussed at the outset, and that all humbuggery and sunburstry should be discounted. The last objection, that even though all able-bodied Irishmen armed, yet they would be unable to liberate this country, we shall deal with quite frankly. If all able-bodied Irishmen armed, even then, the event of a conflict with England would be very uncertain. There is always the British fleet. But when we know that all able-bodied Irishmen are not Nationalists, that the best Volunteer Movement that can grow up on Irish soil to-day will neither in numbers, armament, or leadership be equal to the British army, we know that to start with the assumption that this movement is going to deliver Ireland quickly from her political ills is mischievous. What it is going to do if it be guided manfully is to put a public opinion with backbone in it into the country, to make men more conscious of their duty as citizens, to associate the ideas of order and discipline with the

idea of liberty, to bring the manhood of Ireland in touch with realities, and to make it clear-seeing and fearless—to create, in fact, an atmosphere in the country in which the gasbag and the flapdoodler will cease to be possible. As to what a Volunteer Movement may develop into in time—whether the sword may unite, where now the tongue divides, whether the comradeship of arms may beget a comradeship of purpose in North and South, whether as manliness is in itself hostile to meanness and littleness, the soldier-sympathy of North and South will beget national oneness—we cannot prophesy. But these things may be so, and a national army strong to hold Ireland for the Irish be eventually evolved. All this is with God. To deserve of Him, the nation must do the duty to its hand. It is the clear duty of every able-bodied man to arm in his country's cause, let the event be what it may. The Volunteer Movement gives the opportunity. Everything may come of it, as the enthusiastic hope; nothing may come of it, as the pessimistic think. This alone is true: It is not for us to speculate whether a national duty performed to the best of our ability and opportunity will succeed or fail—it is for us to do our duty. Therein we acquit ourselves as men, and defeat can hold for us no dishonour. To help the Volunteer Movement is a national duty. If it fails, Ireland is not worse than she is to-day, and some of her men have become individually better men. If it succeeds—why if it succeeds the name of Irishman will be a title of nobility in all the people's eyes. In this movement, at least, all Nationalist Irishmen—divided by a dozen minor antagonisms, have joined, and we believe whole-heartedly. Long may that national bond endure, and cursed be the knave who would seek the ascendancy of any section in this holy union. Some look forward to the opening of a Home Rule Parliament next year or the year after us as the total of their wishes. What of that? It is to them the triumph of the nation. But if that Parliament be opened who shall salute its inauguration? Not the heirs of the British soldiery who (?)¹ the Irish Parliament House, but the heirs of the men who made it free.

¹ Cartlann: Most likely 'closed' but illegible.

The glint of the Irish sabre and the flash of the Irish rifle hailing an Irish Senate—however poor it be—can light the path of a nation. On with the Volunteers.