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Patrick O'Donohoe's narrative of the 1848 rising

By Gary Owens

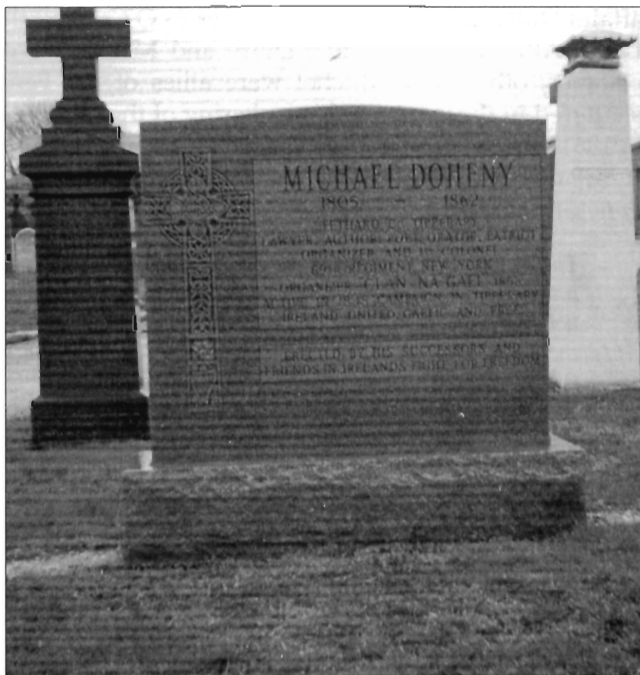
The rising of 1848 was a literary event in the sense that many of its leading participants eventually produced recollections of their experiences. The narrative which follows represents an important addition to that body of writing, but it differs from most of the other memoirs in at least two respects. First, it would appear to be the earliest such account, being written in Kilmainham Jail within weeks of the rising (the famous skirmish at Ballingarry occurred on 29 July; the author was imprisoned a fortnight later; and he completed his manuscript fifteen days after that).

Second, unlike many of the other memoirists of 1848, Patrick O'Donohoe was neither a prominent figure in the Irish Confederation nor could he be considered among the top tier of those who attempted to launch an insurrection. He was, nevertheless, present at many key events and was privy to a number of important discussions among the leaders.

What is known of O'Donohoe's life before the summer of 1848 can be briefly recounted. He was born at Clonegal, Co. Carlow around 1815. By the mid-1840s he was living with his wife and daughter at 25 Portland Place in Dublin and was employed as a clerk for the solicitors O'Brien and McGrath at 20 Summerhill, with an annual income of £200-£300.¹ Like many young Catholic men of his class and generation, he became an active supporter of Daniel O'Connell's repeal campaign.

When the movement split in 1846 O'Donohoe sided with the Young Ireland group in opposition to O'Connell and, with the establishment of the Irish Confederation in January 1847, he joined that body's executive council. As he confesses in his narrative, however, he ceased to attend its meetings after three months and he refused re-nomination to the council the following year. As he also states, he was not particularly active in his local Confederate organization, the Grattan Club, though he became a joint vice-president of that 600-man body shortly before the rising.

O'Donohoe's comparatively low



Michael Doheny's grave in New York. The inscription reads:

MICHAEL DOHENY 1805-1862, Fethard, Co. Tipperary – Lawyer, Author, Poet, Orator, Patriot, Organizer and 1st Colonel 69th Regiment, New York, Organizer “Clan na Gael” 1858, active in 1848 campaign in Tipperary – Ireland United Gaelic and Free – Photo: copyright M. Bourke.

profile within the Confederate movement partly explains why he was suspected of being a government spy when he suddenly appeared in Kilkenny searching for the Confederate leader William Smith O'Brien in late July 1848. According to Charles Gavan Duffy, his looks also made him seem "the very ideal of a police agent" in that he was "a big, black scowling fellow". O'Donohoe provides a vivid account of his "apprehension" on suspicion of spying, an event to which other memoirists of the rising have alluded in their published accounts.²

O'Donohoe did not take part in the affray near Ballingarry, having decided the day before to make his way through the countryside along with a handful of Confederate leaders. O'Donohoe, Maurice Richard Leyne and Thomas Francis Meagher remained at large together in Co. Tipperary until they were arrested on 12 August and taken immediately to Kilmainham Jail, where O'Donohoe composed the narrative that appears below.

He was tried before a special commission at Clonmel on 11-14 October on a charge of high treason and was found guilty along with Smith O'Brien, Terence Bellew MacManus and Meagher. All four were sentenced to be hanged, drawn and quartered, but this punishment was later commuted to transportation for life.³

Unlike his colleagues, O'Donohoe failed to gain immediate employment in Van Diemen's Land and he refused the charity of sympathetic residents. He eventually started a weekly newspaper, *The Irish Exile*, but the ultra-nationalist tone of the paper, along with subsequent threats to publish even more inflammatory articles, twice prompted the colony's governor to order his incarceration in convict stations.

He escaped from Van Diemen's Land in December 1852 and made his way to the United States, where he died in poverty in Brooklyn, New York, on 22 January 1854, the very day that his wife and daughter arrived in New York from Ireland to join him. Following his death, one of his colleagues provided a fitting epitaph: "he was not one of those the world calls great and gifted, but his courage and devotion to a desperate cause at a desperate crisis, were undoubted, were unsurpassed; no one questions them."⁴

The manuscript from which the following account is transcribed consists of 37 folio pages in a bound volume in the National Library of Ireland (NLI MS. 770), who have kindly granted permission for its reproduction. It is written in two hands. Bound with it in a more modern hand are three pages of notes concerning O'Donohoe's trial and life in Van Diemen's Land taken from the *Freeman's Journal* and three late nineteenth and early twentieth century works on Irish history and the Irish in Australia. Punctuation has been modernised where necessary, but the original spelling and capitalisation have been retained.

Incidents connected with political disturbances in Ireland in 1848: origin, progress and failure of the movement

By P. O'Donohoe

The origin of the recent political troubles in Ireland, which by some are magnified into insurrection, may be traced to the Autumn of 1846 when some of the most honest and best meaning patriots in Ireland began to look with suspicion on the proceedings then being



enacted in Conciliation Hall and determined on seceding from the Repeal Association. That secession was followed by the seceders meeting from time to time in Wicklow Street where they formed themselves into a Remonstrant Body and eventually drew up a document by way of remonstrance to the O'Connell Policy in which they pointed out the various heads of corruption then existing in the Repeal Association. After the presentation of this document to Mr. O'Connell and its indignant rejection,⁵ the Remonstrants increased very rapidly in numbers. This body was dissolved about the month of November 1846.

In January 1847 the Irish Confederation was formed out of the materials that composed the Remonstrant Body and a council, with power to add to its number, was named. The first meeting of that body was held in the Rotunda in January 1847. I was named a member of the council and attended its sittings for the first three months very punctually, but after that period I seldom attended it. A new council was elected in Jan'y 1847⁶ when my name was struck off and never afterwards restored – although Mr. Mitchell⁷ and Mr. Meagher⁸ pressed me to permit my name to be reinstated which I peremptorily declined.

For the object I propose, it is unnecessary to give more than this general outline of the preparatory steps which ended so abruptly in the late melancholy catastrophe. It is notorious that one of the political offsprings of the Irish Confederation was the establishment of clubs, which emanated from Mr. Duffy⁹ and which bore a strong resemblance to the Repeal reading rooms founded by Mr. O'Connell in 1843. One of these clubs designated the 'Grattan Club' was established in Cumberland Street several months ago and I became a member of it some months after its formation. Mr. Meagher was President and Mr. Patk. J. Barry¹⁰ was Secretary to that Club. I seldom attended the Club, but whenever I did I invariably dissented from the views and objects put forward by Mr. Barry, which were always extremely violent and created great suspicions in my mind against him. On Sunday the 17th July, Barry proposed me, without my previous assent, as one of the vice presidents of the club in conjunction with Messrs. John Byrne and Parker;¹¹ but I never acted in an official capacity.

This rapid sketch brings me to Saturday the 22nd July 1848, on which day news arrived of a bill having been introduced into Parliament to suspend the Habeas Corpus act with power to the Lord Lieutenant to cause the arrest and imprisonment of all suspected political offenders until the 1st March 1849, and that an order for the arrest of Smith O'Brien¹² had also arrived. I attended a meeting of the 'Grattan Club' next day (Sunday) when Barry and his brother made two violent and outrageous speeches which I condemned very much.

On Monday the 24th July, I heard of a warrant having been issued for my arrest. I walked through the streets of Dublin in the hope of obtaining accurate information respecting the several warrants issued, called at the *Nation* office, at the rooms of the [Confederation] council in D'Olier St., at the rooms of the 'New League'¹³ in Dame St., through the hall and avenues of the 'four courts', but to no purpose – all was vagueness and rumour.

On my return towards home between 3 and 4 o'clock I met Mr. John Lawless of Sandymount¹⁴ who informed me he was going to visit Mr. Duffy in Newgate and requested me to wait for him till his return. I did so and he brought me a special request from that gentleman to proceed at once to Kilkenny where I would find Messrs. O'Brien, Dillon,¹⁵ Meagher, O'Gorman,¹⁶ Doheny,¹⁷ Denny Lane of Cork¹⁸ and all the leading men at Dr. Cane's¹⁹ house and that I would then receive directions how I should act. I did not contemplate what these directions would be but Lawless, having at the same time informed me that Duffy told him I would be arrested if caught in Dublin, at once determined me when proceeding to Kilkenny. Accordingly I hurried to the Railroad station, accompanied by Lawless, and took my seat to Bagenalstown²⁰ in [the] 1/2 past 4 o'clock train. Mr. J.F. Lawlor²¹ travelled in the same train with me but we never



exchanged a word and he left the train at Kildare. Mr. Keely,²² a member of the council of the Confederation, met me at the Terminus, King's Bridge and handed me a letter to deliver to Smith O'Brien.

On my arriving at Bagnalstown I hired a car and reached Kilkenny at 10 o'clock at night and immediately proceeded to Dr. Cane's house, where Mrs. Cane, her son and servant informed me the Doctor had gone to Cork to give evidence at the Assizes – that Messrs. O'Brien, Dillon and Meagher had left Kilkenny early in the Day and that she could not inform me whither they had gone. I thereupon left Mrs. Cane's and returned to Houston's hotel where I bespoke a bed and ordered a chop and a glass of whiskey and water. I felt great exhaustion, not having tasted food since 5 o'clock the previous day, and was already indulging in anticipation in the luxury of my chop when two men unceremoniously rushed into the room where I was sitting, called for two glasses of punch, made some rude observations and completely dissipated by their obtrusive conduct all my visionary hopes of a comfortable meal. After a variety of impertinent inuendoes, the most uncouth of the two intruders introduced politics and pressed me for my opinions, which I did not hesitate to express with candour. He then, notwithstanding that my political exposition seemed to square with his own views, accused me with being a police detective who had specially come from Dublin to arrest Smith O'Brien, that I had been at Dr. Cane's house for that purpose and that he and two others were apprized of my intention, and that they had come to look after me and that unless I could explain myself very fully, he and his friends would keep me in custody.²³

Desperately irritated by this indecent conduct, I put both at defiance; but finding very soon that they had assistance and that I should be overpowered, I told the fellows I was a friend of Smith O'Brien and produced the letter I had received from Keely in proof of my assertion. Patrick Cavanagh,²⁴ for that I learned afterwards was the name of one of these men, snatched the letter from me, broke the seal and read the contents and then placed the letter in his pocket, still asseverating that I was a Detective. James Stephens, for that was the name of the other man and who was subsequently, I understand, killed at Ballingarry,²⁵ thereupon interfered and proposed in order to prove and ascertain who I was, that a car & horse should be procured and that he and Kavanagh should take me in custody to Smith O'Brien, whom he said we should find at Cashel.

Sentence of death could scarcely have struck more gratefully on my ears than this inexorable determination of the two strangers who had assumed to themselves the unenviable task of becoming my keepers. Being entirely worn out by fatigue, loss of sleep and want of food, I entreated of those men to permit me to go to bed for a few hours, but in vain. Live or die they insisted I should accompany them without further loss of time. A horse and car was wheeled round to the door of the Hotel and I was placed upon it under the close *surveillance* of Kavanagh & Stephens.

It poured rain all night and having neither great coat or umbrella, I was perfectly drenched. Fortunately, I believe, for my health, Kavanagh dearly loved a drop of the 'Crathur' and at every carman's stage on the road Kavanagh supplied the horse with meal and water and the travellers with flaggons of "pottieen". Excepting the short intervals occupied by the horse and his cargoe in these refreshing draughts, we got along at a very spanking pace.

We arrived in Thurles between 4 and 5 o'clock on the morning of Tuesday the 25th July & the first person I saw in the streets was Mr. P.J. Smith,²⁶ a member of the council of the Confederation. He at once recognised me. I mentioned to him the Dilemma in which my fellow travellers had placed me.²⁷ In vain did he expostulate at their perverse behaviour in keeping me a prisoner. It was no go. They insisted that I was their prey and that into Smith O'Brien's hands



I should be delivered. Smith then informed us that O'Brien was in possession of the town of Cashel; that he had three thousand men with him and that the green flag was floating from the rock of Cashel; that he was proceeding to Dublin to give directions to the clubs how they should act and had already given direction to Messrs. Ryan, Butler²⁸ and others to have the rail road broken up from Thurles to Templemore in order to prevent the transit of troops from the latter place.

After this piece of intelligence which was, by the way, egregiously false, my persecutors consented to let me have a little tea, after which we proceeded towards Cashel and arrived there between 10 and 11 o'clock and found no flag floating or the slightest bustle of any kind. I was conducted to the house of Mr. Doheny²⁹ and then found Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Dillon, Mr. Cantwell³⁰ and Mr. Doheny in a back parlour. Mr. O'Brien inquired at once the object of our mission and, after a good deal of merriment at my expense, Kavanagh departed, leaving Stephens behind and the latter expressed a desire to remain with Mr. O'Brien. On reading the letter which I carried & the seal of which had been broken by Kavanagh, Mr. O'Brien stated it was anonymous and a pack of trash.

Immediately after this and without consultation of any kind, Mr. O'Brien expressed a desire to quit Cashel. Two cars were got in readiness; Messrs. O'Brien, Dillon and I occupied one and Messrs Cantwell and Stephens occupied the other. The first village we reached was Killenaule where we changed horses. While this was being done, a crowd collected which Mr. O'Brien addressed from the side of the car and opposite a Police Barracks. Several Police were present and seemed to smile approbation at the sentiments uttered. He shortly enumerated Ireland's wrongs, stated the persecution he was undergoing for having advocated the redress of these wrongs, and called upon the people to save him from arrest. The crowd vociferously shouted that they would save him and we left the village amid the greetings and acclamations of its inhabitants.

We now bent our course towards the village of Mullinahone, distant from Killenaule about 7 miles in a south easterly direction, where we arrived about 5 o'clock in the evening. On our entrance to the town we were surrounded by the villagers in large groups who were most enthusiastic in seeing Smith O'Brien. The carman pulled up at the shop of a man named Kickham.³¹ Mrs. Kickham invited us in and gave us a hospitable reception. The Revd. Mr. [William] Cahill, Catholic curate here, called on us and entered into a long disquisition with Messrs. O'Brien & Dillon on their policy and the imprudence of any disturbances on the part of the people, alleging principally as his reasons that it was premature, that the harvest was unripe, and that the people would be starved. He also urged the great power of the British Army & Navy and our want of organization.

Mr. Cahill left us in a bad temper. After he had gone, the principal young men of the village and



Patrick O'Donohoe

neighbourhood waited upon Smith O'Brien. The chapel bell was tolled and the streets of the village became crammed with people, all offering to stand to the death by Smith O'Brien. Mr. Wright,³² a fine young man of great intelligence, invited us to his house in the village, where most of Mr. O'Brien's party passed the night. In the meantime the crowds of people increased in vast numbers. Mr. O'Brien gave directions to have them placed in military array. He addressed them as at Killenaule, pointing out their sufferings and their endurance, his own persecution; called upon them not to permit his arrest, but inculcated them in the strongest terms the necessity of preserving the rights of property and cautioned them against infringing on vested rights of any kind; that all he required from the British Government was impartial laws and protection for the poor from famine and protection of his own person from arrest for advocating those rights which he conceived the British constitution guaranteed to all its subjects.

After this he continued to drill the men who thronged about him until 3 o'clock next morning. There could not have been less than two thousand persons in the village during the night, about one thousand of whom were armed with muskets, pikes, pitch forks & scythes and the remaining numbers promised to procure some next day. Having found myself in this position, I resolved upon presenting myself at the Confessional and on the evening of Tuesday the 25th, I called at the house of the Revd. Mr. [Daniel P.] Corcoran, Parish Priest of Mullinahone. On seeing that gentleman I explained the object of my visit, but on learning that I belonged to Mr. O'Brien's party he positively declined to hear any confession.

Immediately after this I retired to rest but, wearied though I was, I could obtain no rest in consequence of the constant noise of musket shots and the shouting of the country people who continued to pour into the town all night. I got up at 6 o'clock on Wednesday the 26th July and found Mr. O'Brien dressing after two hours' sleep. On finishing his toilet he went out into the street armed with two pistols and directed myself and Mr. Stephens to accompany him with loaded rifles which we did and, followed by some others, proceeded about a quarter of a mile outside the village on the Cashel road. We were joined by some men and boys, amongst whom was a man named Constable,³³ a Protestant gentleman farmer who resides near the town. He brought us into his demesne and pointed out several trees which he directed his men to cut down to enable Mr. O'Brien to have barricades erected on the roads leading into the village.

Mr. O'Brien, Stephens and I went into the Police Barracks where we found 5 or 6 constables. Mr. O'Brien called upon them to surrender their arms. The constables remonstrated, stating that the surrender of their arms would have the effect of causing them to be dismissed and that their families would be ruined. They also stated that their hearts were with Smith O'Brien and his cause and that at the proper time they would be found in his ranks. Mr. O'Brien said he did not wish to spill blood; that he wished to redress the wrongs of the Irish people without loss of life or property. Eventually the Police stated that if Mr. O'Brien brought 20 or 30 men which would be capable of overpowering them and give a colour to them for being obliged to surrender their arms, they would most willingly surrender them. Mr. O'Brien then left the Barracks and did not again return to it. The Police constables left the Barracks and removed to some neighbouring town – Cashel I believe.

After leaving the Barracks, Mr. O'Brien, Stephens and I went to Wright's house where we met Dillon, Cantwell, the two Wrights, Mrs. Wright and her daughter at Breakfast. Immediately after Breakfast, the Revd. Mr. Corcoran and four or five of the shopkeepers of the village called upon us. Mr. Corcoran urged very strongly the imprudence of Mr. O'Brien's course, stating the poverty of the people, the danger of defeat and that no hope of success could be entertained until the harvest was over. Upon which Mr. O'Brien expressed his readiness to



surrender that instant if the Revd. gentleman so desired – to which the latter replied that he would shed his heart's blood to save him, Mr. O'Brien, from arrest.

This ended the interview, upon which Mr. O'Brien directed Mr. Cantwell and myself to proceed instantly to Carrick-on-Suir, a distance of about 10 miles, where we would meet Mr. Meagher and ascertain from him his intentions. We at once proceeded, and upon getting within about three miles of the town of Carrick we met Doctor Ryan,³¹ president of the Carrick clubs, mounted on a horse and proceeding to Smith O'Brien to inform him that Meagher had fled from Carrick where the police had been in pursuit of him and that he was then concealed at Mr. O'Mahony's³⁵ near the base of Slievenamon Mountain. On receiving this intelligence we returned back to Mullinahone and found that Mr. O'Brien, Dillon and Stephens had left for Ballingarry, having been invited there by a party of men who had collected in our absence.

Ballingarry is situated in a mountainous district and distant about 6 miles from Mullinahone. Cantwell and I followed Smith O'Brien and overtook him going into Ballingarry. He was followed by about six hundred men armed with guns, pistols, pitchforks and pikes. They were marching in good order and singing merrily. The Revd. Mr. [Edmond] Prendergast, Parish Priest of Ballingarry, was in a gig at their head and was after giving them benediction. Nothing could exceed the enthusiasm of the country people. Men, women and children shouted joyously and every man we met who was not in the ranks promised cooperation. I met numbers with pikeheads in their hands bringing with them from the neighbouring forges.

On arriving at Ballingarry, Mr. O'Brien and the multitude proceeded towards the Catholic chapel. Mr. O'Brien ascended the wall of the chapelyard and addressed the people for about twenty minutes. He strictly enjoined respect for property and cautioned all persons against joining him who would not preserve the rights of property inviolate. He desired all married men who had families to remain at home and all poor labouring men to continue at their labour and stated he desired no man to join him who could not bring with him three day's provisions of bread or biscuit; that he desired society to be preserved and concluded by desiring all present to go home except twenty men who he selected to guard him from arrest during the night. Mr. Dillon also addressed the people much to the same effect.

At the conclusion of Mr. Dillon's speech, Messrs. Doheny and Devin Reilly³⁶ arrived. Messrs. O'Brien, Dillon, Stephens, Doheny and Reilly and I then had some mutton chops – no drink of any kind except water. After dinner Mr. Doheny rather hypothetically asked Mr. O'Brien if Carrick were taken should the Bank be seized and the money carried off? At this question Mr. O'Brien was quite horrified and asked, in return, if Mr. Doheny wanted to uproot social order and destroy the character of the movement. He went on to say that the revolution he wished to achieve should be done without injury to property; that otherwise all the good and virtuous portions of the community would condemn and stigmatize us as plunderers; that he was desirous that all men should pursue their callings as usual; that the merchant should attend his counting house and the Artizan his trade as usual, and that he would be no party to any other course. Mr. Reilly condemned Mr. O'Brien for being premature and after some other interesting remarks Doheny and Reilly left us.

Mr. O'Brien then gave orders to have barricades erected across the principal entrances into Ballingarry and directed me, Stephens and Cantwell to keep watch alternately at the Barricades during the night, lest the Police or Military should surprise him whilst asleep. Cantwell kept the first watch which ended at 12 o'clock; Stephens the second which ended at 2 o'clock; and I kept the third watch from 2 till 7 o'clock.

At about 1 o'clock at night Mr. McManus³⁷ arrived, having escaped arrest in Liverpool. I then for the first time learned the plan of the revolution proposed. It was this. McManus and his



confederates in Liverpool were to take a fortress or place of arms and convey them in Steamers to Wexford to arm the Insurgents there and, in certain events, Liverpool and the dockyards and shipping were to be burned. Thomas D'Arcy McGee³⁰ was sent to Glasgow on the 21 July to take Stirling and to convey the arms and ammunition contained in it to Killala to arm the insurgents there. Mr. McDermott³¹ was sent to France for officers to drill the men and direct the movement. Mr. O'Flaherty³² was sent to America to purchase arms and ammunition and to bring them with officers and volunteers and land them on the western Irish coast. Mr. Doheny was to take Cashel; Mr. Meagher was to take Waterford and Carrick; Mr. Dillon was to take Athlone; Mr. O'Gorman, aided by Mr. Doheny, was to take Limerick; and Mr. O'Brien was to throw himself generally on the country. After taking the first town, a Proclamation was to issue, signed by Smith O'Brien and other leading members, stating their views and objects and all parties were to concentrate and march on Dublin where previous intimation of the approach of the Insurgents would be conveyed. This is a rough outline of the project which I now learned for the first time. I was aware that an executive council of five, consisting of Dillon, O'Gorman, Devin Reilly, Meagher and McGee had been named on Thursday the 20th July, and had been appointed by the general deputies representing the clubs, but until now I was not aware of any plan of action.

Shortly after McManus's arrival at Ballingarry, Mr. O'Mahony also arrived from Slievenamon with a letter from Mr. Meagher to Mr. O'Brien requesting the latter to join him at Slievenamon. Mr. O'Brien hesitated and refused to send an answer to Mr. Meagher until the next day. At 5 o'clock on the morning of Thursday the 27th, Mr. O'Brien desired Cantwell to proceed on horseback to the Revd. Mr. Kenyon³³ and ascertain his views. Cantwell asked the loan of a horse from a man named O'Donnell, a collector of poor Rates in the town of Ballingarry. O'Donnell said he was afraid to give the horse voluntarily but said he would have him saddled in the stable and that Cantwell and I should go into the stable and insist that the boys in the stable should give the horse; and the boys in the stable, apparently reluctantly, but in reality quite voluntarily, gave the horse and Cantwell galloped off to Father Kenyon.

The Chapel bell was tolled about 8 o'clock and the people soon began to assemble in the street armed with guns, pikes and pitchforks. At about 11 o'clock O'Brien reviewed them in rank and file and drilled the gunmen in hedge and street firing and the pikemen in charging. He then sent to Meagher by O'Mahony, informing him that he would march that day to Slievenamon. Soon after, Mr. O'Brien learned that a gentleman 3 miles from Ballingarry had a great quantity of arms and ammunition, whereupon he directed McManus and Stephens and myself with twelve men to proceed there and take the arms. I remonstrated at this step and it was abandoned.

We then marched from Ballingarry into Mullinahone with 300 men on the route to Slievenamon. On arriving at Mullinahone each man got a pound of bread (and water), for which McManus paid. The people of Mullinahone joined us in great numbers and stated they were all armed and that they would follow us to Slievenamon that night. At this point the Revd. Mr. Cahill³⁴ spoke to some of the people dissuading them from their intentions. His wish rapidly communicated itself, and after proceeding one mile beyond Mullinahone on the road to Carrick, the entire body of men deserted us, leaving Messrs. O'Brien, Dillon, Stephens, McManus and myself alone on the high road. We took refuge in the house of Paddy Ryan, a farmer, 20 perches from the high road. Here Mr. O'Brien seemed to despair. He lay down behind a cock of hay and took two hours' repose and we all afterward amused ourselves firing at a mark with rifles. This was my fifth night without any sleep scarcely, and little or no food.

At 10 o'clock Mr. O'Brien called us together and asked each of us in turn what we would do as all hope was over. Dillon said he would escape to his native county; McManus said he would



escape to America; Stephens said the same; and I said I would share Mr. O'Brien's fate. Mr. O'Brien said I could not do so, as he would go to Cahirmoyle⁴³ and throw himself on his tenantry who would save him from arrest. I had only £3 in cash and felt all hope of escape hopeless. We all felt very gloomy.

Mr. O'Brien lay down a few minutes and then started up and said he would go on to Killenaule. A horse and car was provided and at 11 o'clock at night we started for Killenaule, when within about a mile of the latter place we met a horse and car conveying a traveller. We hailed him and found him to be a young man named Butler who had just been at Father Kenyon's where he saw Cantwell, Meagher and Leyne.⁴⁴ He returned with us to Killenaule where he delivered us a rifle, a brace of pistols and a large quantity of ammunition and then left us.⁴⁵ We slept in the Hotel of the village for two or three hours. At 6 o'clock Mr. O'Brien directed McManus and myself to proceed and arrest the judge who was on his way from Nenagh to Clonmel & that he might be kept as a hostage. McManus was attacked with nervous fever and the project was abandoned.

A rifle was given to a country man and he and Stephens were directed to patrol in front of the Hotel. A crowd assembled. Mr. O'Brien walked to an eminence over the town and while there two Dragoons rode into the Village and passed on. They created great alarm and a rumour spread that the Military were advancing on the town. McManus left his bed, mounted a horse and galloped outside the town to reconnoitre. Dillon, Stephens and I set to work to erect Barricades and in 15 minutes 3 substantial Barricades were thrown up, distant about 50 perches from each other. The first and third of the Barricades were at right angles with large stronghouses, from the windows of which a very few men with guns could have slaughtered great numbers. The Barricades were composed of crates or kishes of turf, beams of timber, stones and so forth. In the meantime, O'Brien had returned into the village and having placed him in a place of security, Dillon, Stephens, myself and about 20 of the country people mounted the first Barricade.

A troop of the 8th Hussars were now in sight and within a few paces of us. They trotted right up to the Barricades and the officer in command desired to pass. It was refused. A wild cheer ascended from the crowds of people who were thronging in all directions and had already mounted the two other Barricades. The people were armed with all manner of weapons: spades, Pickaxes, Pikes, pitchforks and Guns. Mr. O'Brien was standing in a yard at the rear of a House within 10 yards of the front Barricade. I leaped off the Barricade and ran to him to get his directions. He was standing alone with a pistol cocked in his hand. He desired me [to] tell Dillon [to] inform the officer in command that if he pledged his honour not to arrest him, Smith O'Brien, he should be permitted to pass as he, O'Brien, did not wish to spill blood unnecessarily. I conveyed these instructions to Mr. Dillon who crossed the Barricade and stated Mr. O'Brien's proposition to the officer. The officer pledged his honour accordingly, whereupon a space was opened in the Barricades and the officer and his men passed on.

There is no doubt that if a collision had taken place we would have killed or captured the entire troop. Our position was admirable and the people were desperately determined and all armed with some weapon or other. Immediately after this, O'Brien reviewed some hundreds of men in the streets. He was presented with a handsome address by the young men of the town and the entire scene was very animating. I received a hurt in the erection of the Barricade and threw up blood after the affair terminated.

We then started towards New Bermingham thro' the collieries. The people flocked round us in all directions. At the junction of the road which leads from Killenaule to New Bermingham thro' the Collieries we erected a strong Barricade of stone and columns of sand. It was now



about 2 o'clock on Friday the 28th. The rain poured in torrents and we took refuge in a hut on the high road from New Bermingham to Urlingford. Mr. O'Brien addressed about 150 colliers, all of whom stated they had guns and ammunition and were ready to fight. We got bread and milk for dinner in the hut. While there, O'Brien, Dillon, McManus, Stephens & I were joined by Meagher, Leyne, O'Mahony, Devin Reilly, Doheny, Cantwell and Byrne.¹⁰

After some conversation there we proceeded towards the commons of Bolough,¹¹ having previously received a message to go into Urlingford where 500 men awaited our arrival but we doubted this messenger as a spy and proceeded to the commons. It rained all the way. Having arrived there we went into a public house where we consulted on the past and future proceeding. Cantwell stated that Father Kenyon dissented entirely from Mr. O'Brien's policy. Mr. O'Brien insisted that he could save himself from arrest for 5 weeks by going from town to town as he had been doing during the week. We all differed from him in this view. Dillon proposed we should fall back on Kilkenny, take possession of a large house, make a Fortress of it, issue our proclamation from it and that the people would rally. This was also dissented from. Eventually Smith O'Brien resolved to remain at the commons. McManus resolved to remain with him. So did Stephens. Meagher resolved to go towards Waterford and that Leyne, O'Mahony and I should accompany him. Devin Reilly and Doheny determined to go to Killusty, south side of Slievenamon, Dillon and Cantwell to go towards Roscommon, Byrne to go to Dublin and bring down 200 riflemen and all to concentrate at the earliest moment.

After this, O'Brien, Dillon and Meagher addressed the people outside, and having done so, Meagher, O'Mahony, Leyne and myself walked to Ballingarry, from thence to Mullinahone and on thro' 9 mile house to the flank of the northern side of Slievenamon where we arrived at 3 o'clock on the morning of Saturday the 29th July. We slept a few hours in a farmer's house and then climbed a rock in the mountain where Meagher, Leyne and I spent the day. This was the day the affray occurred between O'Brien's party and the police, where I understand Stephens was mortally wounded. Of this I know nothing unless thro' the newspaper reports. On the night of Saturday the 29th, Meagher, Leyne and I moved 3 miles farther up the mountain of Slievenamon where we slept and spent the next day, Sunday. In the mean time, Meagher dispatched O'Mahony on various errands. He returned to us at 10 o'clock on Sunday evening accompanied by McManus who, after the fight with the police at Bolough commons on Saturday, escaped. McManus informed us that O'Brien had fled after the affray at the commons and that Stephens had been mortally wounded.

Immediately after the arrival of McManus and Mahony, P.J. Barry, Secretary of the Grattan Club and Grey,¹² Secretary of the Swift Club, arrived. We suspected these men to be spys [*sic*] and, having given them directions to return to Dublin to manage the clubs and informed them that we were going to Carrick-on-Suir, we parted [from] them and doubled across the summit of the mountain and arrived at the other side at 3 o'clock on Monday the 31st of July. We spent this day on the south side of the mountain near Doheny but did not see him. On Monday night Meagher, Leyne, McManus and myself started for Keeper mountain, a distance of about twenty miles. We travelled thro' Fethard, Holy Cross and arrived at Clonoulty on Tuesday the 1st August. We called here at Mr. Mahony's repeal Warden who told us he had 200 men ready. We slept that night on wet straw on a hay loft and at 5 next morning we climbed a range of hills at the base of Keeper Hill. It rained all day. The mountaineers flocked round us in great numbers and promised to accompany us to Keeper Hill. Meagher and Leyne addressed them. On our arrival at the village of Kilcommon, Revd. Mr. [John] Molony P.P. called on us and he, having admonished the people, they deserted us.

We now abandoned all hope & retraced our steps by another road leading to Borrisoleigh. It



is called the Anglesey road. We slept in a bog, that is Meagher, Leyne and I, McManus having gone away from us. Next night we got lodging in a Farmer's House. The following night and day we were walking through the fields, the people being all afraid to shelter us. While in this state we received a message from the Revd. Mr. [John] Mackey, P.P. of Clonoulty, requesting of us to surrender and that he wd. proceed to Dublin Castle to intercede for mercy. Mr. Meagher consented to surrender if a general amnesty to all political offenders were granted. On this understanding Mr. Mackey proceeded to the Lord Lieutenant but his terms were rejected.¹¹ Whilst wandering about in search of shelter and hopes of aid, we were arrested between 11 and 12 o'clock on the night of Saturday the 12th August by a party of 5 police Constables on the road between Clonoulty and Holy Cross.¹² We were conveyed to the House of Inspector Bracken of Thurles¹³ who treated us with great Hospitality and courtesy. Mr. Gore Jones, R.M.,¹⁴ came to Mr. Bracken's house. So did General McDonald,¹⁵ and after some preliminaries we were conveyed by special train to Dublin and after being conveyed to Prince George's quarters, Royal Barracks, we were safely lodged in Kilmainham Gaol on Sunday morning the 13th August.

The foregoing narrative, drawn up in great haste under very disadvantaged circumstances, contains the principal leading incidents which came under my observation in this unfortunate affair. I omitted to mention that Mr. Meagher had 600 picked men ready at a moment's warning to march from Waterford and throw themselves into Carrick, Kilkenny or any other town, but he apprehended a defeat and great loss of life and his humanity urged him not to risk the shedding of innocent blood. While at Slievenamon a special messenger came to Mr. Meagher offering to bring out those 600 men, but Mr. Meagher declined doing so. I heard that Mr. Dowling¹⁶ had 200 very brave men on the north side of Keeper Hill ready to join any Main Body and that various other leaders were ready to cooperate, but of this I know nothing unless from a general rumour.

I am unable to offer any positive reason for the total failure of the Leaders, but I attribute it to three concurring causes. First, there does not appear to have been any properly preconcerted plan and that it was only on the news of the suspension of the Habeas Corpus that the Leaders resolved upon any aggressive line of action and even then, only a few of them resolved upon this course, leaving the other Leaders of the Dublin club men in total ignorance of their intentions. This ill considered and premature conduct arose, I think, partly from Mr. Duffy's approaching trial and his anxiety to press matters to extremities before his day of Trial arrived which induced him to push Mr. O'Brien forward and partly from the issuing of the Warrant for Mr. O'Brien's apprehension at the same conjuncture. The executive council of 5 were only two days in existence and had no time to maturely consider any subject. Therefore, the attempt was truly premature.

The second reason of its failure may be very fairly attributed to the interposition of the Catholic clergy of the south of Ireland who denounced from their altars the Leaders and their schemes of revolution and anarchy. But the great and paramount cause of failure beyond all question arose from Mr. Smith O'Brien's scrupulous and conscientious behaviour respecting the rights of property. He was unceasing in enforcing morality, sobriety, absence of all crime and, above all, to touch no man's property and infringe no private rights of any kind. This doctrine was wholly unsuited to the class of men he addressed it to in the mountain fastnesses of Tipperary; impoverished, famished, and thirsting for food and revenge on those whom they conceive have so long oppressed them. Therefore, such admonitions were distasteful and disgusting and invariably had the effect of driving the people away grumbling with disappointment. It was truly ridiculous to hear the leader of a revolution which, to be successful, should have sanctioned all the wild and savage passions of the hordes of oppressed



wretches who followed its standard, inculcating those virtues which are practised in the best ordered communities. Such inconsistency was discernable to the meanest of his followers. They could not reconcile such doctrine with the notions they entertained of that course of licentiousness which the flood of revolution was about to open to them. Hence the rapid desertions which invariably followed his harrangues. On his first appearance in every village and Hamlet he was hailed with ecstasy as a deliverer and men, women and children would have followed him to death in wild delight. But the moment he spoke, their visions of future happiness vanished and they shrunk from his standard in despair and dismay. It was a pitiable sight to behold a man possessed of so many great qualities so deficient in the one most necessary to achieve the great task he designed.

However, it was the triumph of virtue over vice. It was a conquest, on behalf of all the ennobling instincts of humanity, over those servile and mean passions which are made by vicious, vain-glorious men the instruments of success. What therefore mankind in general might call his greatest weakness was well considered his highest virtue. He scorned success when to obtain it would create rapine and crime & he sacrificed personal ambition to preserve the rights of others. He possesses the most rigid virtue, the purest courage and reckless bravery but a scrupulous conscience frustrated his undertaking. A vicious man with the talents and prestige of O'Brien's name would have overthrown English dominion in Ireland. A man of such virtues could not and never will succeed in Ireland.

28th August 1848

FOOTNOTES

1. *Tipperary Vindicator*, 28 October 1848; List of Dublin members of the Irish Confederation, 23 April 1848, Royal Irish Academy, MS. 23.H.43.
2. See, for example, Charles Gavan Duffy, *Four Years of Irish History, 1845-1849* (London, 1883), pp. 656-7; Michael Doheny, *The Felon's Track, or History of the Attempted Outbreak in Ireland* (Dublin, 1914), pp. 168-9.
3. Accounts of the trial can be found in *Freeman's Journal*, 13-14, 16 and 24 October 1848.
4. Much useful biographical information on O'Donohoe and others listed in his narrative is found in T.F. O'Sullivan, *The Young Irelanders* (Tralee, 1944).
5. The remonstrance was received at a meeting of the Repeal Association on 26 October 1846 and promptly thrown out of the window of Conciliation Hall into the gutter. On this and other events of these months, see Richard Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement* (Dublin, 1987), chs. 3-4.
6. The new council was elected on 12 January 1848 (not 1847): *The Nation*, 15 January 1848, p. 36.
7. John Mitchel (1815-75). Represented the extreme wing of the Confederate movement. He has been the subject of numerous biographies; his *Jail Journal* is often reprinted.
8. Thomas Francis Meagher (1823-67). The best account of his career is Denis Gwynn, *Thomas Francis Meagher* (Cork, 1961). His narrative of events in Tipperary in 1848 can be found in Arthur Griffith (ed.) *Meagher of the Sword: Speeches of Thomas Francis Meagher in Ireland, 1846-1848* (Dublin, 1916).
9. Charles Gavan Duffy (1816-1903). At the time of the 1848 rising he was incarcerated in Newgate prison, Dublin. His most recent biography is Cyril Pearl, *The Three Lives of Gavan Duffy* (Sydney, 1979).
10. Dublin law clerk and near neighbour of O'Donohoe, residing at 13 Portland Place. Barry reportedly "knew personally every enrolled Confederate in Dublin ... Nature had given him a countenance that did not inspire confidence; he was loud and vainglorious in conversation, and in the Council, of which he was a member, loved to cap extreme proposals by something more extravagant. For these reasons, or it may be for others more solid, he had fallen into discredit in the Clubs, and there was a wide-spread suspicion that he had occult relations with the police." Duffy, *Four Years*, p. 673.



11. The appointment of O'Donohoe, Byrne and Thomas Parker as vice-presidents of the Grattan Club took place on Monday (not Sunday) the 17th: *The Nation*, 22 July 1848.
12. (1803-64), M.P. and titular leader of the 1848 Rising. His role in Irish politics in this period is best described in Denis Gwynn, *Young Ireland and 1848* (Cork, 1949).
13. Formally launched on 11 July 1848, the league represented an unsuccessful attempt to amalgamate the so-called Young Ireland and Old Ireland factions.
14. Secretary of the St. Ruth Confederate Club, Sandymount and resided at 4 Mountain View, Sandymount Road. He was later arrested for his role in the rising.
15. John Blake Dillon (1814-66). Co-founder of *The Nation*. See Brendan O Cathaoir, *John Blake Dillon, Young Irelander* (Dublin, 1990).
16. Richard O'Gorman (1826-95). Leading member of the Irish Confederation. He was in Limerick during the rising and eventually escaped to the United States. His recollections of the rising can be found among Gavan Duffy's papers, National Library of Ireland, MS. 5886.
17. Michael Doheny (1805-63). Journalist, poet, historian, barrister. At the time of the rising he practised law in Cashel. His *The Felon's Track* is a classic account of the events of 1848.
18. (1818-95). Barrister, poet and businessman, he was a close friend of Thomas Davis and a frequent contributor to *The Nation*.
19. Dr. Robert Cane, M.D. (1807-58). Prominent Kilkenny physician and historian. Twice Mayor of Kilkenny.
20. In 1848, the main rail line to Kilkenny was not yet complete; it terminated at Bagenalstown, Co. Carlow.
21. James Fintan Lalor (1807-49).
22. James Keely, a tailor, resided at Eustace Street. Police Notes on Political Activities, 1848-9, Trinity College Dublin, MS. 2038, p. 64.
23. On this incident and its background see James Stephens, "Personal Recollections of '48", *The Irishman*, 4 and 11 February 1882 and Duffy, *Four Years*, pp. 656-7.
24. Stephens described Kavanagh only as "middle-aged and soldierly in attitude"; he had served in the army and owned an "establishment" in Clonmel. "Personal Recollections", *The Irishman*, 4 and 18 February 1882.
25. James Stephens (1824-1901), founder of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. O'Donohoe erroneously believed that Stephens was dead because, as Stephens later noted, "my friends got up a mock funeral after the Ballingarry affair, in order that the authorities might be put off the scent and believe I was no more." They filled a coffin with stones, attached a suitably inscribed breastplate and had it buried with due solemnity. The event was reported in at least one local newspaper. Stephens, "Personal Recollections", *The Irishman*, 10 June 1882. See also, Desmond Ryan, *The Fenian Chief* (Dublin, 1967).
26. Patrick James Smyth (1826-85). Later M.P. for Westmeath and Tipperary.
27. According to Gavan Duffy he cried out: "Look here, Smyth, these d——d rascals take me for a spy, and hold me a prisoner." *Four Years*, p. 656.
28. Almost certainly the surgeon, Dr. Thomas Ryan, a prominent Tipperary Confederate and "Mr. Butler", President of the Tipperary Confederate Club. See *The Nation*, 29 July 1848, p. 492.
29. Michael Doheny.
30. James Cantwell (1818-75). Dublin mercantile assistant, restaurateur and Mitchelite; accompanied P.J. Smyth to Tipperary.
31. Either John or James, father and uncle respectively of the future author and Fenian, Charles J. Kickham (1828-82). See R.V. Comerford, *Charles J. Kickham: A Study in Irish Nationalism and Literature* (Dublin, 1979), pp. 14-21.
32. J.D. Wright (d. 1864) In his recollections of events in Mullinahone at this time, C.J. Kickham describes him as "a youngster". Duffy, *Four Years*, p. 660.
33. Unidentified.
34. Dr. Thomas Ryan.
35. John O'Mahony (1815-77). Founder of the American Fenians. At this time he resided on his family's



farm of Mullough in the parish of Ballyneill. His account of the rising is in NLI MS. 7977.

36. Thomas Devin Reilly (1824-54). Journalist and Mitchelite.
37. Terence Bellew MacManus (1823-61). His Dublin funeral gained wide attention for the I.R.B.
38. (1825-68). Journalist, from Carlingford, Co. Louth. Escaped to the United States and then to Canada where he became a prominent statesman.
39. Martin MacDermott (1823-1905). Architect and poet.
40. Martin O'Flaherty, John Mitchel's former solicitor.
41. Rev. John Kenyon (1812-69). Curate and pastor of Templeberry, Co. Tipperary and ardent Mitchelite. See L. Fogarty, *Father John Kenyon: A Patriot Priest of Forty-Eight* (Dublin, 1921).
42. Unidentified.
43. His family seat in Co. Limerick.
44. Maurice Richard Leyne (1820-54). Relative of Daniel O'Connell and frequent contributor to *The Nation*.
45. Stephens says that at this point O'Donohoe "was in the most lugubrious spirits possible" and that his talk frightened Butler into returning immediately to Dublin. Stephens, "Personal Recollections", *The Irishman*, 11 March 1882.
46. John Byrne, vice-president of the Grattan Confederate Club in Dublin.
47. Boulagh Commons near Ballingarry.
48. Philip Gray (1821-57).
49. This incident is discussed in the diary kept by Mackey's pastor, Rev. Thomas O'Carroll, printed in Rev. Philip Fitzgerald, *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Confederates of '48* (Dublin, 1868), pp. 99-103.
50. Fr. O'Carroll described their arrest in his diary as follows: "13 Aug. - It appears that they left about eleven last night, with the intention of going to Cashel, and not knowing the country went in the direction of Thurles. After passing the police-station of Rathkennan, without attracting any notice, Leyne stopped behind to light his cigar. A police patrol under constable Madden came up with Meagher and O'Donoghue in the meantime without a challenge, Meagher having completely thrown them off their guard by the nonchalance and good humour with which he bade them "good night". On meeting Leyne, who was just coming out from a peasant's hut as they passed, they challenged him, and having demanded of him to tell them whither he was going, he answered, "to Cashel". They instantly arrested him, and pursued his companions, whom they also arrested without resistance". *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5. See also "Thomas Francis Meagher - His Last Days in the Tipperary Mountains", *Tipperary Vindicator*, 18 November 1848.
51. J.H. Bracken, Sub-Inspector of Constabulary.
52. J.G. Jones, resident in Thurles.
53. Probably Major-General John MacDonald.
54. Unidentified.

