

'67.

# RETROSPECTION.

A CONCISE HISTORY  
OF THE  
FENIAN RISING AT BALLYHURST FORT,  
TIPPERARY.

BY  
WILLIAM RUTHERFORD.

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By WILLIAM RUTHERFORD.



Church Street

Limerick

5<sup>th</sup> Decr 1905.

The Author begs to congratulate  
Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa,  
"the unchanged & unchangable  
Irish Rebel" upon his return  
to his native land. after years  
of exile, & wishes him many  
happy years in the land for  
which he has done and dared  
so much. —

## DEDICATION.

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TOBIAS ENGLISH, ESQ.,

*Eden, Tipperary.*

*Dear Sir,*

*Permit me to dedicate to you the following concise history of the Fenian "rising" at Ballyhurst Fort, March, '67, as a souvenir of the friendship which has subsisted between us those years. And this friendship is further enhanced by me, when I know that it is your earnest desire to see Ireland a nation "free and grand."*

*I remain, dear Sir,*

*Yours sincerely,*

THE AUTHOR.

*Tipperary, 1903.*



## History of the Rising at Ballyhurst Fort, Tipperary.

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**M**ORE than three decades of years have passed away since the Fenian "rising" at Ballyhurst Fort. Looking across that long vista of time, the reminiscences of that epoch appear before my mind as if they were of yesterday. In the early sixties the Fenian organisation was founded by the late James Stephens, for the overthrow of British rule in Ireland by force of arms and the establishment of an Irish republic. Tipperary was made an important centre of the organisation. There, like the mustard seed, its roots sunk deep and spread far.

There the lamp of liberty was kept "brightly burning" by a people "rightly" struggling to be free. The spirit of nationality evoked by the founding of the organisation was unique, indeed, in the modern history of Ireland. It became a great power in the land. Fell dissention gave way to peace and concord. Hydra-headed faction was buried in oblivion. The fears of the timid were allayed. The sceptical were convinced, and Nemesis tracked down the betrayer. The young men of the town and vicinity were enrolled in their hundreds, and the very few who kept aloof were politically ostracised.

The arrest of the Fenian leaders—James Stephens (and his subsequent escape from Richmond Prison),



Thomas Clarke Luby, John O'Leary and Charles J. Kickham, and the seizure of the *Irish People*—went like wildfire through the country. Those drastic measures were followed by wholesale arrests in various parts of the country, until the jails were filled with "suspects," at the beck of the policeman or the whisper of the spy. The triumvirate of the organisation, Thomas Clarke Luby, John O'Leary and Charles J. Kickham, were tried for treason-felony, convicted, and sentenced to long terms of penal servitude.

The following few instances out of many will prove the strong hold which the organisation had taken among the people, young and old. Early on the day of the "rising" I visited the home of an aged couple who had three sons, who were their sole support. When I entered the house, I found the parents sitting before a brightly burning fire. Noticing the absence of the sons, I asked "Where are your sons?" And the Spartan mother replied and said, "Begor, sir, they are gone to the field, and we may never see them again. But welcome be the will of God."

A respectable Protestant artisan, the father of four sons, three of whom were *out*, the fourth being of tender years, was with difficulty restrained from going *out* with his sons. A sexagenarian father and his only son were among those who were *out*. And last, though not least, was a soldier of the Queen. At twilight I noticed a man in the ranks attired in soldiers' clothes, over which he wore a civilian overcoat. On closer inspection I recognised the man at once. He was a native of the town, had enlisted, and was on furlough some time before the "rising." I said to him, "Oh, John, what

has brought you here?" And he replied, "I came *out* with the 'boys,' and I know that if I am caught I'll be shot." And when the "rising" was suppressed, the Spartan Fenian soldier made his escape to America.

Needless to say, that numbers of those who were *out*, after the failure of the "rising," sought safety in flight to foreign lands to evade the clutches of the law.

And the emissaries of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, undaunted by the thought of the terrible risk run, enlisted solely for the purpose of trying to win Irish soldiers from their allegiance to the English crown. And most prominent amongst those Fenian soldiers was the poet patriot, the late John Boyle O'Reilly.

In 1863, filled with the revolutionary ideas of the time, he enlisted in the 13th Hussars (the Prince of Wales' own) with the deliberate intention of enrolling such likely Irish soldiers as were contained in its ranks under the oath of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. He was arrested at Island Bridge Barracks, Dublin, on the 13th February, 1866, and in the following June, after a trial lasting twelve days, was found guilty and sentenced to be shot, the arch-spy, Talbot, being one of the principal witnesses against him. During the trial, O'Reilly's superior officers testified to his good character, apart from his revolutionary propagandism, and his sentence was commuted to twenty years penal servitude. The spy, Talbot, was afterwards *shot* in the streets of Dublin.

O'Reilly and some others, who were sentenced along with him, were conveyed to Mountjoy Prison, from which, after a short detention, they were marched in *chains* through the streets of Dublin and shipped to England, where the gloomy cells of Pentonville, Mill-



bank, Chatham, and Dartmoor in succession were tenanted by O'Reilly before his transportation beyond the seas to the penal settlements of Western Australia, which took place in October, '67. During the period spent in these English prison hells O'Reilly made three daring attempts to escape, each of which failed. On the 10th January, in the following year, he arrived at Freemantle. After a month there, he was transferred to the convict settlement of Bunbury, from which place he made his escape in an open boat in April, 1869.

In this daring and successful exploit, O'Reilly had the valuable aid of the Catholic chaplain of the settlement, the Rev. Patrick MacCabe. He landed at the City of Philadelphia, 23rd November. In a short time he went to New York, where he received a hearty welcome from the adherents of the Fenian cause in that city. From New York he proceeded to Boston. There he entered into a successful career as a writer, poet, and lecturer, finally becoming the leading Irishman in America. He died in 1890, in the very prime of his life and manhood, with an unrivalled position of authority as a publicist, and acknowledged as a poet and a man of letters.

And the citizens of Boston, without distinction of class or creed, erected a splendid memorial in honour of the poet, patriot and Fenian soldier, John Boyle O'Reilly.

The recruiting sergeant had reaped a golden harvest in Tipperary these years. The youth of the town, having taken the Saxon shilling and donned the English uniform, *strutted* through the streets in all the pride and glory of soldiers of the Queen.



## THE SAXON SHILLING.

Hark ! a martial sound is heard,  
 The march of soldiers, fife, drumming,  
 Eyes are staring, hearts are stirred—  
 For bold recruits the brave are coming.  
 Ribbons flaunting, feathers gay,  
 The sounds and sights are surely thrilling,  
 Dazzled village youths to-day  
 Will crowd to take the *Saxon Shilling*.

Ye, whose spirits will not bow  
 In peace to parish tyrants longer ;  
 Ye, who wear the villain brow,  
 And ye, who pine in hopeless hunger ;  
 Fools, without the brave man's faith,  
 All slaves and starvelings who are willing  
 To sell yourselves to shame and death,  
 Accept the fatal *Saxon Shilling*.

Irish hearts ! why should you bleed  
 To swell the tide of British glory,  
 Aiding despots in their need  
 Who've changed our *green* so oft to *gory* !  
 None, save those who wish to see  
 The noblest killed, the meanest killing,  
 And true hearts severed from the free,  
 Will take again the *Saxon Shilling* !

Irish youths ! reserve your strength  
 Until an hour of glorious duty,  
 When Freedom's smile shall cheer at length  
 The land of bravery and beauty.  
 Bribes and threats, oh, heed no more,  
 Let naught but *Justice* make you willing,  
 To leave your own dear Island shore  
 For those who send the *Saxon Shilling*.

Ere you from your mountains go  
 To feel the scourge of foreign fever,  
 Swear to serve the faithless foe  
 That lures you from your land for ever ;

Swear henceforth its tools to be  
 To slaughter, trained by ceaseless drilling ;  
 Honour, home, and liberty  
 Abandoned for a *Saxon Shilling*.

Go—to find 'mid crime and toil  
 The doom to which such quiet is hurried ;  
 Go—to leave on Indian soil  
 Your bones to bleach, accursed, unburied ;  
 Go—to crush the just and brave,  
 Whose wrongs with wrath the world are filling ;  
 Go—to slay each brother slave,  
 Or spurn the bloodstained *Saxon Shilling*.

In the meantime the Government was not inactive. In anticipation of the "rising," they drafted a large body of troops of all arms, horse, foot and artillery, in all about a thousand men, into the town. At that time the great barracks which now commands the town was not built. The town became a veritable military camp. The soldiers were ubiquities. They were stationed in the Town Hall, the Court-house, the Jail, the Work-house, the National Schools, and in several derelict houses in different parts of the town. The artillery occupied the market square. All the pomps and circumstances of war were brought into evidence by the frequent spectacle of

Files arrayed with arm and blade,  
 And plumes in the gay wind dancing.

And the bugle-call, as it resounded through the streets, became a familiar sound to the people of Tipperary.

Patrick Brett, a carrier in the employment of a dealer in Thomastown, a village about four miles from Tipperary, was proceeding homewards on Tuesday, March 5th, in charge of a bread-van. The road from



Tipperary to Thomastown lies adjacent to the Fort. The Fenians espied the van, and, acting on the adage that "All's fair in love or war," captured the van, brought it to the Fort, and distributed the bread. Brett and his charge was permitted to proceed homewards without further molestation. Brett afterwards appeared as a Crown witness at the trial of Col. Bourke, in which he played an infamous part.

Referring to Brett's evidence, Col. Bourke said :—

"That man Brett has sworn that I stood upon the van and distributed the bread. I was not in the Fort at the time. I came in afterwards."

On Tuesday, March 5th, Tipperary presented an unique appearance indeed. Early in the forenoon the town was filled with men of all sorts and conditions, from the beardless youth of eighteen summers to the staid man of three-score years, who paraded the town in semi-military order, or gathered in groups at the street corners, earnestly discussing the *pros* and *cons* of the impending "rising," in which they were soon to participate. And ere the sun had gone down on that cold March day, those men had wended their way to Ballyhurst Fort, and there raised the banner of revolt.

At roll call No. 17 was absent. I asked, "Where's No. 17?" and a man in the ranks spoke out and said, "He's at home, under the bed, and very far in," which reply caused considerable amusement to those who heard it. I said, "Perhaps he feels safer at home and under the bed than to be *out*," at which the men again laughed. And there were several No. 17's. When the "rising" was suppressed, No. 17 emerged from his



hiding place *covered with feathers*. And Belt Hogan had a busy time of it plucking the feathers off No. 17 and his comrades.

Night having set in, enveloping us in her sable mantle, the darkness being relieved ever and anon by the light of a refulgent moon, whose beams revealed the presence of hundreds of insurgents, who defended the Fort. And as the night wore on, a violent storm swept over the Fort, from which the men sought refuge as best they could. But small shelter, I ween, had those who were *out*, under the cold canopy of Heaven with the thermometer below zero.

During the early hours of the night one of the men said, "Captain, Cashel is taken." I asked the man by whom, and he replied, "By the Fenians, and they are marching to our aid." "I doubt it very much," said I. The inhabitants of that ancient city, which is situated about six miles from the Fort, slept peacefully that night, their slumbers being undisturbed by the tramp of armed men, or the roll of musketry. There was one citizen, indeed, who was *out*. Mr. Thomas Walsh, the editor and proprietor of the *Cashel Sentinel*, a weekly paper, which he conducted with ability and success, bore his share in the "rising" at the Fort. And thus the hypothetical capture of the City of the Kings ended in thin air.

Not far from Ballyhurst Fort, about two miles as the crow flies, is situated Grantstown Hall, the seat of the late Captain Charles Massy, a well known and popular gentleman, familiarly called "Captain Charlie." The Captain was a noted equestrian. He kept a stud of highly-bred horses. And, therefore, to Grantstown



Hall a party of men were ordered to proceed for the purpose of procuring remounts for the American officers, Colonel Bourke, Captains Harris, O'Dowd, and the Doctor who accompanied those officers. The night was dark, and the tramp of the men was drowned in the rising storm. As we approached the "Hall," we observed lights in the numerous windows which it contained, indicating that the Captain had not yet retired to rest. And our advent was heralded by the loud baying of the many dogs which the Captain always kept at the "Hall." On entering the courtyard we were met by the Captain, who enquired as to the object of this visit of armed men at that late hour of the night. The Fenian Captain having informed him of the object of their visit, requested him to lead the way to the stables, and, after some demur, he complied. Shortly after four prancing steeds were led forth, well bridled and saddled. Nor was this all. Captain Charles was made a prisoner of war, The Fenian Captain, addressing Captain "Charlie," said, "The exigencies of the times compel me to place you under arrest, which I now do, in the name of the Irish Republic, now virtually established," and, suiting the action to the words, he laid his hand upon Captain "Charlie's" shoulder, and thus placed him under arrest, and at the same time informed him that he should bring him to the Fort, pending further orders. Captain "Charlie" strongly protested against being brought to the Fort, but his protests were in vain; the Insurgent Captain was inexorable, and to the Fort Captain "Charlie" was brought, and, by permission, was allowed to ride one of his own horses. And thus the Captain and his escort



arrived at the Fort. And as they passed through files of armed Fenians, most of whom knew the Captain, he was received in respectful silence. Shortly after his arrival at the Fort, he was ushered into the presence of the American officers, to whom he was introduced. Colonel Bourke having made enquiries anent Captain "Charlie's" arrest, ordered his immediate release, and also directed that he should be safeguarded thence to the "Hall." Captain "Charlie" and the American officers parted on the best of good terms. On the Captain's arrival at the "Hall" with his escort, he regaled the men with beer, as a mark of his appreciation for their respectful demeanour to him. Now, the Captain knew many of the men who made the nocturnal raid upon the "Hall," seized and carried away his horses, and ended by placing him under arrest, and, as a prisoner, had escorted him to Ballyhurst Fort. And, to his honour be it said, he made no complaint nor divulged the incidents of that eventful night.

The authorities having heard of the raid on the "Hall" and its sequence, lost no time in investigating the matter by seeking an interview with the Captain, which was readily granted. The authorities having informed the Captain of the object of their visit, requested him to aid them by any information which he might possess that would lead to the arrest of the parties who raided the "Hall." The Captain became indignant, and flatly refused to give the slightest information to them about the matter. "What," said he, "do you want to debase me to the level of the common informer, a perjured wretch on whose oath I would not hang a dog." And the Captain added, "On my honour as a gentleman,



from the kindly treatment which I have received at their hands, from the American officers, whom I found to be a superior class of men, down to the men who composed the rank and file of the Fenian forces, I could not say or do aught that would in the least bring any of them into the meshes of the law." And thus the authorities and the Captain parted. After the failure of the rising, the Captain's horses were restored to him, evidently none the worse for the part they played in the "rising."

Captain O'Dowd was a martinet—he was accustomed to have his orders obeyed. And when the necessity arose he did not hesitate to use the most drastic measures to enforce his commands, as the sequel will prove. Among the men under his command was one who hailed from the vicinity of the Fort. This man, who displayed a spirit of insubordination in the early hours of the afternoon, eventually expressed his determination to return to his home, which lay hard by. And shortly after he proceeded to carry out his intention. Stepping out of the ranks, he laid down his pike and was proceeding to his home, when Captain O'Dowd called upon him in no uncertain voice to return. But the recalcitrant Fenian refused to obey the order. The Captain did not repeat his order. Instantly drawing his revolver, he fired at the man, who fell with a groan to the ground, seriously wounded in the hip. The wounded man was carried to his home by some of his comrades, where he was attended by the American doctor, who extracted the bullet and did all that medical skill could do for the speedy restoration of the patient. After a few weeks the man recovered from the effects of his wound, but maimed for life.



On the evening of the 5th the military attacked the Fort, and after the interchange of a few volleys retired under cover of darkness. Next day the attack was renewed, the Fort captured, and the "rising" suppressed. And ere the sun had sunk to rest, Tipperary Jail was filled with scores of insurgents.

At daybreak on the morning of the 6th, a small detachment was ordered out for outpost duty, between the Fort and the town. The men, some of whom were armed with rifles, whilst others carried pikes, had scarcely reached their rendezvous when there appeared on the horizon a body of military, marching at a quick rate towards the Fort. Shortly after, the soldiers having espied us, fired a volley at us with serious results. Several of the men were wounded, one fatally. Now the rifles our men were armed with were of an antiquated pattern, and of indifferent calibre, therefore, our fire in reply to their volley proved harmless indeed. The result was, we were forced to yield to the inevitable, and retired to the Fort, carrying with us our wounded. Shortly after our return, a discharge of musketry came crashing through the leafless trees, with which the Fort is thickly studded, exfoliating the bark, and, in a few instances, the bullets ricocheted off the trees, wounding several of the men, while many more became embedded in the natural circumvallation of the Fort, which shielded the men from the enemies fire.

Colonel Bourke and a large number of his followers, who were captured at the Fort, together with those who had evaded arrest and returned to their homes after being "out," were confined in Tipperary Bridewell for a short period, and thence sent to Clonmel Jail to await



their trial. Those who had escaped the clutches of the authorities for the time being congratulated themselves upon their good luck, but they counted without their host—they lived in a fool's paradise. They thought not of those who had played a treacherous part after the failure of the "rising." Their astonishment then, nay, consternation, was very great indeed when day after day, and for weeks, wholesale arrests were made in the town at the whisper of those who had learned to "betray."

The Colonel and the other prisoners, on their removal from the Bridewell to the station, were escorted by a strong guard of police and military, horse and foot. Colonel Bourke was accommodated with a car, the other prisoners were handcuffed in pairs. On their way from the Bridewell to the station they were joined by their relatives and friends, who accompanied them to the station. On arriving at the station, where a long line of carriages awaited them, they took their seats, with their escort. And as the train moved slowly out of the station, the mothers and sisters of the prisoners gave vent to their long pent-up feelings, and filled the ambient air with their loud cries and lamentations, while the men muttered curses, not loud but deep, upon the informers. Colonel Bourke was tried before a Special Commission, held at Green Street Courthouse, Dublin. He was tried for high treason, found guilty, and sentenced to be hanged, drawn and beheaded. His speech from the dock on that occasion was most eloquent. It has been ranked with Robert Emmet's. The sentence was afterwards commuted to penal servitude for life. After spending some years in the prison hells of England, he, and several other prominent leaders of the Fenian movement, were



amnestied, on the rigidly enforced condition of expatriation. His fellow-prisoners, who were tried at Clonmel Assizes and, with few exceptions, found guilty, were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

And thus ended the abortive Fenian "rising" of '67.

After the failure of the "rising" the inevitable informer turned up. Out of scores of insurgents captured, only about four craven cowards could be found to learn to "betray." Panic-stricken, and with all the terrors of the gallows dangling before their minds, this quartette of traitors took the blood money and swore away the lives and liberties of their quondom comrades. The authorities no longer requiring their nefarious services, sent them to the far off ends of the earth, tracked down by the Nemesis of their crime, until they shall sink into a nameless grave, "unwept, unhonoured and unsung."

Why, get thee gone! horror and night go with thee.  
Sisters of Acheron, go hand in hand,  
Go, dance round the bower, and close them in,  
And tell them that I sent you to salute them.  
Profane the ground, and for the ambrosial rose  
And breath of jessamine, let hemlock blacken  
And the deadly nightshade poison all the air;  
For the sweet nightingale, may ravens croak,  
Toads pant, and adders rustle through the leaves;  
May serpents, winding up the trees, let fall  
Their hissing necks upon them from above,  
And mingle kisses—such as I would give them.

Patrick Russell, the man who was fatally wounded, despite all that medical skill could do, died in the course of a few hours. His remains were interred in Lattin graveyard, situated about four miles from Tipperary. In the course of time his comrades, who



shared with him the dangers of the "rising," raised a tombstone over his grave bearing the following inscription, "Sacred to the memory of Patrick Russell, who was shot at Ballyhurst, March 6th, 1867. R.I.P."

Far dearer the grave or the prison,  
Illum'ned by one patriot name,  
Than the trophies of all who have risen  
On liberty's ruin to fame.

Singular to relate that the grave of Patrick Russell, he who died for Ireland, has been allowed to fall into a scandalous state of neglect those years. The tombstone lies recumbent, nay, almost horizontal, with the grave, which is almost hidden from view by an overgrowth of thistles and rank grass. And thus is the memory of Patrick Russell allowed to sink into oblivion by the pseudo nationalists of Lattin.

O tempora, O mores.

Many of those men who were "out,"

Who rose in dark and evil days,  
To right their native land,

have passed away.

Some on the shores of distant lands  
Their weary hearts have laid,  
And by the stranger's heedless hands  
Their lonely graves were made;  
The dust of some is Irish earth,  
Among their own they rest,  
And the same land that gave them birth,  
Has caught them to her breast,

Dean Swift gave it as his solemn judgment that in a conflict between a warrior armed with a sword and a gun, and a man in his night-gown armed with a bodkin, the odds were rather against the latter. And there was scarcely greater equality in the conditions of that conflict. They could not prevail against superior arms, superior discipline, and superior numbers.

A late eminent writer said :—

“They failed, it is true, to accomplish what they attempted, and the battle to which they devoted themselves has yet to be won ; but we know that they, at least, did ~~there~~ <sup>their</sup> part courageously and well ; and looking back now upon the stormy scenes of their labours, and contrasting the effects with the cost at which they were made, the people of Ireland are still prepared to accept the maxim :—

’Tis better to have fought and lost,  
Than never to have fought at all.”

The elements, too, befriended England, as they had often done before. Hardly had the insurgents left their homes when the clear March weather gave place to the hail and snow of mid-winter. The howling storms, edged by the frost and hail, swept over mountain and valley, rendering life in the open air impossible to man.





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