

The 1916 Rising in Ireland

a journal account by Goddard H. Orpen

Tuesday the 25th April [1916]

Adelaⁱ and Eddieⁱⁱ had intended to start early this morning for Dublin, for the Spring Show. They were going to motor to Bagenalstown, leave the motor there and take the train. But the baby was ill in the night with some sort of choking symptom, and they gave up the idea. The first intimation we received that anything was wrong came from the postman, who arrived late without any newspapers except Monday morning's Irish Times – no English mail. He said there had been a disturbance in Dublin, the line had been broken up. This was to Adela. To the servants he was more communicative and said that the Sinn Féiners had taken the Post Office and another building, and that the green flag of Ireland floated over Dublin Castle. Meanwhile Eddie and Maggieⁱⁱⁱ went to Dr Kelly about the baby, and to send a wire to Johnny^{iv} to say that he was not to expect him and Adela as the baby was unwell. Miss Kehoe at the post office said that no telegrams could be accepted, that was the order and in answer to enquiries: no, the wires were not broken, they were open for service messages: but there had been a disturbance. What sort of disturbance? Oh a Sinn Féin disturbance she supposed.

In the afternoon Janssen Budgen^v came over to see us and confer together. They had started on Monday evening for Dublin and got as far as Bagenalstown, but there was no train from Kilkenny and the station-master on his own responsibility sent the train back to Palace. Budgen had sent off his steward in the morning, with two bulls for the show, but could not find out what had happened to either man or beasts.

Wednesday 26th

We sent Blackburn^{vi} into town for a load, but on hearing rumours of disturbance in Enniscorthy, Eddie and Maggie went off in the motor to turn him back, if the rumours were true. They heard that all was quiet, so far, in Enniscorthy, and so let Blackburn go on. They went on themselves into Enniscorthy. Mr West of the Bank of Ireland had been in Dublin on Tuesday night, but left by motor at 7am on Wednesday morning. His chauffeur told Eddie that he passed the bodies of dead horses and men on the Donnybrook Road coming out and he drove like blue smoke. Mr West said he lay down in the car and saw nothing. There were any amount of rumours. The Post Office, & the Bank and Westland Road station were in the hands of the Sinn Féiners. The station-master at W.R. had been shot for refusing to give up the keys. A body of Lancers had been cut to pieces by machine guns. There was a machine gun on the top of Nelson's Pillar. There were risings in Cork, Limerick, Co. Clare and everywhere! Germans were landing in Kerry! *Credat judicans!*^{vii}

Blackburn got back alright and said all was quiet in Enniscorthy.

Thursday the 27th

We were told that the Sinn Féiners had seized Enniscorthy Post Office and the Bank of Ireland there, and the Police Sergeant had been shot. That Donahoe's shop and Hayes' had been blown up and Bolger's^{viii} looted. All carts from the country were stopped outside the town and sent back. The shops were all shut. Canon Cooper^{ix} and Miss Vi came over for comfort, but we could give them little. They are greatly disturbed about Theo, who was to be married on May 2. The wedding is not likely to come off now. Sisson Cooper^x left for the Mail at Kingstown on Tuesday evening, but whether he got across or not cannot be known. Little certain is known of the present and nothing of the future. Blackburn went to Ballywilliam for coal, but could only get 7 hundredweight of poor stuff.

We heard too that gunboats had gone up the Liffey and shelled 'Liberty Hall;' this was in a note from Alys^{xi} at Woodbrook.

Friday, 28 April

This is the fifth day of the Sinn Féin rebellion. It is now a few minutes past 7am and I have just opened the bolts and unlocked the gates to let the work people in. Since Monday morning's Irish Times we have had no authentic news of the outside world. No newspapers, no letters, except a few local ones. I propose to jot down a brief record of rumours and events – mostly the former, which have come within my knowledge these fateful days.^{xii}

Saturday 29th of April, 6th day of isolation

So much I wrote on Friday morning, just after opening locks and bars: for we have every possible entrance to the house and yards closed as effectually as we can. But the modern house is not easy to barricade, though this house is better than most. If this sort of thing goes on we shall have to go back to the 13th century keep and bawn. Yesterday there were more rumours. There is no doubt that the Sinn Féiners hold Enniscorthy. It was they that turn back the carts. The country folk are getting alarmed as they don't know where to get provisions. Mrs Conran^{xiii} at Rathnure will soon run out, if she has not done so already. She was stopped in her trap on Thursday, and sent back. So was Mrs Leary's of the Gate Lodge^{xiv}, and many others. It is now said that the D.I. was wounded at Enniscorthy but the sergeant was not shot. The police seem still to hold the barracks as the rebels are said to be firing at them from the heights over the river. Henry Roche is afraid they will take his castle, no new event for that historic building. Other rumours flocked in in the afternoon. The Germans did land in Kerry, but a boat full of ammunition was sunk. There was heavy firing at Arklow, 3000 soldiers are said to be marching from Gorey towards Enniscorthy. Flashlights were seen at Wexford.

We were up on the roof with a strong binocular, but could see nothing, though we thought we could hear the boom of an occasional gun. We have made such preparations as seem advisable in case of a visit from the Sinn Féiners, but this utter absence of authentic news as to what is going on about us, coupled with the feeling that we can place confidence in no one – except the scattered gentry who are as powerless as ourselves – is very wearing to the mind. This is a beautiful morning. The swallows have come and are occupying their old nests under eaves, the beech trees are beginning to show green, and the grass in the Lawn is springing fast. "Earth keeps up her composure"^{xv} while big events are probably happening all over the world as well as in our own little island, and we know nothing of them.

Finlan's^{xvi} news this morning is that "Drover" (i.e. Crohier, an old Dutch name which the neighbours have thus assimilated) Mrs Moffat's^{xvii} steward has come back from Dublin whither he went with a bull to the Show. The bull was seized and slaughtered and Drover wounded. 10,000 soldiers landed in Dublin and 2000 are marching down here. New Ross is quiet. The police and National Volunteers have the Sinn Féiners there in control. 150 "nurses" were shot in Dublin when bringing supplies to the Sinn Féiners! All the beasts for the Show were allowed in and then seized. Mrs Conran's horse has been taken and they are now taking all horses that come near Enniscorthy. What are they doing that for? Well if anything went wrong they would be very useful – for flight I suppose. We have sent Blackburn off to Ballyanne with a cart to try to get flour and provisions there. We have no great store and our work people will be short of food in a day or two. There is a rumour that New Ross has risen, and Blackburn has been cautioned not to go further than Ballyanne and not so far, unless he hears that all this quiet there. It is also rumoured that in Enniscorthy the National Volunteers are going to join the Sinn Féiners. This may be doubtful, but in any case the National Volunteers are a weak reed to trust to. One of the maids brought news from the chapel that conscription had been enacted. What a small matter that seems now!

We got out our telescope today, and fixed it on Killanne Police Barracks. We could see people occasionally appearing and even recognise some of them. In the afternoon we noticed three motor cars which came and appeared to bring the police with their rifles away from the barracks in this direction of New Ross. We sent Finlan on a bicycle to find out what was happening. He came back and told us that all the police were concentrating in Ballywilliam and that there was not "one sinner of them" left at Killanne. He also heard that the Sinn Féiners had all been run out of Enniscorthy "but that a rising was expected in New Ross." Some of them had gone to Whitney's of Garraun and demanded young Whitney's motor bicycle. He was away and Mrs Whitney said she knew nothing about it. They searched the place and pulled about things & damaged them. Later she heard from George Roe at second-hand that Woodbrook had been visited for motors etc. There are none there. Dr Kelly's motorcar (or bicycle) said to have been taken. Blackburn came back a little past 8:00pm. He had got a load of flour and coal etc at Ballyanne. He confirmed the news as to the concentration of police at Ballywilliam, but the sergeant there told him that all was quiet at New Ross. He brought back a note from Janssen Budgen to say that he had seen a Daily Sketch and Daily Mirror. Sir Roger Casement had been taken on the Kerry coast endeavouring to land arms and ammunition from a German vessel and was now a prisoner in the Tower. Wolfe Tone redivivus. Et etiam, Dei gratia, moriturus.^{xviii}

There has been a raid by the German Fleet on the east coast of England and Lowestoft has been shelled. Also three air-raids. But not a word about Ireland in these papers! This is presumably due to the Censor. Janssen also says that he hears there are soldiers in Wexford^{xix} and that things in Dublin are not so bad. He saw today's Free Press. 12 (soldiers?) were killed on Monday (?) and 12 more taking Stephen's Green. The cattle at Ballsbridge, so far as he can hear, are alright.

Sunday, April 30th

Today will complete the first week of the Rebellion, & we are still with little or no authentic news from the outside world - we who used eagerly to read the papers, English and Irish, and to discuss each item. It gives us some idea of the life of by-gone ages when news travelled slowly and only at long intervals, but when rumour in times of stress was, I suppose, as busy as now. This house has seen many such times of stress. In '98 the family had to fly for their lives and the house was gutted^{xx}. In '48 and again in '67 windows and doors were strengthened with iron bars which we have brought into use again. In '81 etc iron turrets were set up over the hall door and at the N.W. angle and these may become useful again. But several weak points have arisen since, and stopping all possible entrances is like stopping an old rabbit warren. Last night we had every living thing except the two donkeys, housed and within walls. This morning I had the four foals let out, they at least have no military value. The reports by the people coming from Mass are to the effect that no word was said by the priest of information, advice, warning or guidance of any sort, though some words about the state of the country were expected. The talk was to confirm the Sinn Féin visit to Woodbrook, Whitney, and Deacon of Belmont. That after one o'clock yesterday, business was going on as usual in Enniscorthy but nothing definite was known - not even if there were any soldiers there. There were rumours that the National Bank had been robbed or even blown up. The Sinn Féiners had taken possession of the Athenaeum and the Castle and turned it into a barracks. There were rumours of a "settlement" in Dublin.

The day wore slowly on without anything happening or our receiving any more definitive news until about 3.30. Alys arrived on her bicycle from Woodbrook. She mockingly held up her hands on dismounting, as I unbolted the postern door to welcome her. It appears that two motorcars, the first containing an unrecognised man and woman, the second containing six Sinn Féiners, armed, drove rapidly along the road from the direction of Kiltlealy towards Killanne when the Sinn Féin car broke down opposite Davis's cottage. About this time Dr Kelly came in his car from Ballindaggan & was held up by the Sinn Féiners. He was asked to

help with the faulty engine & while doing so four of the Sinn Féiners got into his car & drove up to Woodbrook. They knocked loudly at the door and immediately opened it and burst in.

Meeting Alys they held a revolver to her head and demanded all arms, ammunition and petrol in the house. Alys, not losing her presence of mind, asked in the name of what government they make this demand? They replied "in the name of the Republican Army of Ireland". They had done with King George and they showed a paper signed by Rafter and others. Alys said "I shall give you what we have. Wait till I call Thomas". They followed her closely while she called Thomas and told him to give up guns and ammunition. He brought two fowling pieces etc. and the men departed with them without further trouble. Meanwhile Eddy Blacker came up to the broken motor and Dr Kelly, and was hurrying up the avenue when Sinn Féiners drove past. The first motor car had given word to the police at Killanne but they merely enquired whether there had been a raid on Woodbrook or not. This was on Saturday at about 12.30 and the police left Killanne at 3.30. The Sinn Féiners returned to Enniscorthy in Dr Kelly's motor, but it has we hear been returned to him. The people say that had their motor-car not broken down, the Sinn Féiners would have visited us next.

I should have noted that before Alys came Quigley^{xxi} appeared at my library window evidently with a message of some sort. He told me that the Sinn Féiners had been to Woodbrook and got arms and ammunition, which was all they wanted, and he advised me to give them some if they came, which he thought they surely would. This is practically what we have resolved to do, for though we ought easily settle a motor-car full of Sinn Féiners, to do so in the present defenceless state of the district would bring an overwhelming force of them down upon us, and our last state would be worse than the first. Alys's general news was to the effect that Martial Law has been proclaimed over all Ireland, that 600 soldiers had landed at Rosslare, & that Wexford was quiet and that police had gone to New Ross. It is clear however that the Sinn Féiners rule Enniscorthy uncontested & that there are no police either at Killanne or Clonroche, and probably none nearer than New Ross where they have their hands full.

Monday 1st May

Finlan has been as far as The Still near Enniscorthy, and the news from Rackard^{xxii}, who had got out of the town, was that the soldiers had got as far as Edermine and had given the Sinn Féiners 24 hours to surrender. There had been a 'settlement' at Dublin & time was given the Enniscorthy rebels to communicate with the leaders there. Time was to expire at 4 o'clock this morning. As we heard no guns we may infer that the surrender has taken place. Probably 12 hours not 24 was given? Mrs. Bennet, Mrs. Bolger of Enniscorthy and Pat Neill the auctioneer appear to have received the military summons, but as they are not Sinn Féiners they probably acted as intermediaries.

At 11 o'clock Thomas from Woodbrook and a companion (Fanning?) arrived on bicycles with a letter from Alys of which the following is a copy: "The Inspector General wires: Please give widest and most immediate publication to the following document by the leaders of the Rebels."

Document runs:

"In order to prevent the further slaughter of unarmed people and [in] the hope of saving the lives of our followers now surrounded and hopelessly outnumbered, the members of the provisional government present at the headquarters have agreed to unconditional surrender, and the Commanders of all sections of the Republican Forces will order their followers to lay down their arms.

(signed) P.H.Pearse April 29th 1916."

This proclamation is put up on all telegraph offices, and was put on Killanne at 1.30 today (Sunday.) This looks like the ending of everything. Pearse is a professor in an Irish College. Seán MacNeill^{xxiii} refused to move with the Sinn Féiners for some reason and was promptly made a prisoner by them.

This proclamation seems genuine and has greatly relieved the tension there, but unless the soldiers have surrounded Enniscorthy, they will hardly get all the arms. Finlan says they'll never give up their arms but perhaps both sides will give them up! Irishmen have no appreciation of the difference in status between Rebels and the King's troops. The people here ask, what will be done with the leaders? Will they be punished? Their sympathy now will quickly veer round to them – they don't like the substitution of 'unconditional surrender' for 'settlement.'

There are no police at Killanne yet, and, so far as I can find out, the proclamation has not been posted up there.

Tuesday May 2nd

Today we were able to take up the threads of our ordinary life, to some extent at least. I wrote a long account of the whole week's experience here to Johnny, and asked him to send the letter on to Tom and the nephews. I do not know when it can be posted. Then we worked in the garden etc.

The Enniscorthy S.F.'s appear to have surrendered. "They have 'em all swep" was Finlan's way of expressing that the leaders were carried off in custody. In the afternoon Miss Vi cycled over. She brought an account of Enniscorthy from Mrs Moffat jnr.. It appears that Tom Moffat had to get a pass from the leaders to bring his wife out and they went to Ballyhyland having first locked up their house. On Monday they went back, Tom to stay in his house and Mrs M. to return to Ballyhyland. Mrs M. says she arrived in time to see some of the soldiers march in. She cheered them and they saluted. There were piles of rifles and pikes outside the Athenaeum.

Six of the leaders were carried off as prisoners. Rafter, Etchingham, James Doyle and three others. It was said they asked the guard "Where are you bringing us?" "to Hell " was the gruesome reply . Dr Furlong^{xxiv} was walking along the street with his hands in his pockets. "Hands up" shouted an urchin with a rifle. The doctor took no notice. "Hands up" the youth shouted once more, and on getting no reply fired a shot over the doctor's head. Though many people suffered indignities of various sorts, as far as I can learn the only actual bloodshed was confined to three cases. Grace the Head Constable, was wounded in the face, a constable was shot in the leg, and a girl was killed by a shot intended for the police^{xxv}. The postman came about 4 o'clock but he brought no newspapers, nor any letters, except a few belated ones written before the outbreak. I gave him my letter to J.R.O.^{xxvi}

Wednesday May 3rd

Police not yet back in Killanne, and until they come we cannot be sure that all danger is over in this district. There are rumours of more arrests in Enniscorthy. Wrote a line to Mr. Delafield^{xxvii} to ask if he got any letters posted on Tuesday 25 April. Little news of any sort today.

Thursday May 4th

Sent Leary^{xxviii} into Enniscorthy. Eddie and Maggie motored in afterwards. They brought out an Irish Times of this morning which contained the news that three of the rebel leaders in Dublin had been shot viz. P.H.Pearse, T. McDonagh, and T.J. Clark. They were tried by Court Martial and shot on Wednesday. Also the Free Press of Monday which told us a good deal about the fighting in Dublin up to Saturday – mostly obtained from English sources. It

appears that it was on Good Friday that Sir Roger Casement was taken and the German vessel with ammunition sunk, or rather scuttled by its own crew. On Saturday Apr 22 Eoin McNeill, Chief of Staff – Irish Volunteers, issued the following official announcement: “Owing to the very critical situation, all orders given to Irish Volunteers for tomorrow (Easter Sunday) are hereby rescinded, and no parades, marches or other movements of Irish Volunteers will take place. Each individual volunteer will obey this order strictly in every particular.”

I strongly suspect that the Rising was planned for Easter Sunday or Monday & that at the last moment, owing to the failure of Roger Casement and German assistance, MacNeill endeavoured to put it off but Pearse and some of the other leaders refused to obey.

On Sunday 23rd there was an attempt to wreck a train near The Curragh. On Monday at noon the Rising took place in Dublin. The G.P.O., Four Courts, Daily Express offices, some railway stations and many houses in Sackville Street and elsewhere were taken, and Stephen’s Green occupied. The attempt on the Castle seems to have failed. Tuesday – Martial law proclaimed in Dublin. Wednesday – Liberty Hall shelled from the river. Troops arrived from England. Risings in Ardee, Swords and Lusk as well as Enniscorthy. Continuous fighting in Dublin streets. Thursday and Friday – disturbances in Galway, Killarney, Clonmel, Gorey and Enniscorthy. General Sir John Maxwell takes command in Dublin. Saturday – unconditional surrender in Dublin.

Many more arrests were made in Enniscorthy today (Thursday 4) and yesterday. But it is said that at the time of surrender, many dispersed with their arms. There may be more trouble yet.

ⁱ Adela Orpen née Richards, (1855-1927) born Virginia, USA. Author and active farmer. Wife of Goddard Orpen.

ⁱⁱ Edward Richards-Orpen (1884-1967) son of Goddard and Adela, member of Seanad Éireann 1948-1951.

ⁱⁱⁱ Margaret Richards-Orpen née Tomalin. Wife of Edward, mother of John Richards-Orpen.

^{iv} John Orpen, brother of Goddard, a lawyer in Dublin.

^v Jannsen Budgen, a family friend, lived at Ballindoney, between Rathnure and Ballywilliam.

^{vi} Jamesie Blackburn, longtime employee of Orpens, lived in a cottage on the farm.

^{vii} Believe in judging.

^{viii} Bolger’s drapery shop was the workplace of Paul Galligan, Irish Volunteer and officer in charge of field operations during the Enniscorthy Rising.

^{ix} Canon A.W.F. Cooper, Rector of St. Anne’s Church, Killanne, 1898-1921.

^x Sisson Cooper, son of Canon Cooper.

^{xi} Alice Aird, living with the Blacker family of Woodbrook, Killanne, was sister to Ellen – 2nd wife of Adela Orpen’s father.

^{xii} The writing of the original diary was started on Friday 28th but the transcript runs chronologically.

^{xiii} The Conran family had a shop and pub in Rathnure and had been tenants of the Richards Estate.

^{xiv} The Gate Lodge at Monksgrange was built about 1822.

^{xv} A phrase from the poetry of Robert Browning.

^{xvi} Myles Fenlon, lifelong employee at Monksgrange. Married to Lizzie. He was a Volunteer during the Civil War 1922-23. Later he had an important role as carpenter in Grange Furniture Industries, an Arts and Crafts workshop at Monksgrange 1928-1932.

^{xvii} Wife of Charles Moffat, a noted ornithologist, of Ballyhyland, near Killanne.

^{xviii} Wolfe Tone reborn. And also, thank God, about to die.

^{xix} A column of 1000 soldiers with arms and ammunition had been placed under the command of Lieutenant G.A. French in Wexford to engage the Enniscorthy rebels if required.

^{xx} John Kelly (Kelly the Boy from Killanne) a friend of John Richards of Monksgrange, prevented an attack on the people gathered for protection at the house in May 1798 enabling them a safe escape from his army of Bantrymen who were assembling on Slievebawn hill before marching to Enniscorthy. The house was not gutted but suffered some damage to the roof.

^{xxi} Employee of Orpens and member of the quarrying family on Corrageen Lane.

^{xxii}The Rackard family had pubs in Enniscorthy before acquiring premises in Caim and Killanne.

^{xxiii}Presumably Eoin McNeill who countermanded the orders for the Rising. He was later, like Goddard Orpen, an historian of medieval Ireland and a member of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland and the Royal Irish Academy. He was a critic of Goddard Orpen's historiography though contemporary historians counter his views.

^{xxiv} Administrator of the Catholic parish of Enniscorthy.

^{xxv}The girl did not in fact die.

^{xxvi} Goddard Orpen's brother John.

^{xxvii} An American lawyer for whom Orpen was doing genealogical research.

^{xxviii} One of the O'Leary family, an employee of the Orpens.