

This year, 2016, is a special year for Ireland. A year she commemorates, one hundred years since the Easter Rising. On the 24th April, 1916, POBLACHT NA hÉIREANN, was read at the GPO (General Post Office), O'Connell Street, Dublin.

IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom...

In acknowledgement, I wanted to share two pieces of writing from 1916. One, *Renunciation* a poem written by Padraig H Pearse, founder of the Irish Volunteers and Commander in Chief of the Irish forces and two, an excerpt from one of my top ten favourite poets and authors. James Stephens. He was raised in the Meath Protestant Industrial School for Boys (an orphanage) and was nicknamed 'Tiny Tim', because of his stature. He was a close friend of one of the signatories of the Proclamation, Thomas MacDonagh, a gifted poet himself.

Renunciation

Padraig H Pearse

Naked I saw thee,
O beauty of beauty
And I blinded my eyes
For fear I should fail.

I heard thy music,
O melody of melody,
And I closed my ears
For fear I should falter.

I tasted thy mouth,
O Sweetness of sweetness,
And I hardened my heart
For fear of my slaying.

I blinded my eyes,
And I closed my ears,
I hardened my heart
And I smothered my desire.

I turned my back
On the vision I had shaped,
And to this road before me
I turned my face.

I have turned my face
To this road before me,
To the deed that I see
And the death I shall die.

**EXCERPT from The Insurrection in Dublin (Dublin: Maunsel & Co. 1916) James Stephens diary
account of the week of the Easter Rising.**

Chapter IV: Thursday

Again, the rumours greeted one. This place had fallen and had not fallen. Such a position had been captured by the soldiers; recaptured by the Volunteers, and had not been attacked at all. But

certainly fighting was proceeding. Up Mount Street, the rifle volleys were continuous, and the coming and going of ambulance cars from that direction were continuous also. Some spoke of pitched battles on the bridge, and said that as yet the advantage lay with the Volunteers.

At 11.30 there came the sound of heavy guns firing in the direction of Sackville Street. I went on the roof, and remained there for some time. From this height the sounds could be heard plainly. There was sustained firing along the whole central line of the City, from the Green down to Trinity College, and from thence to Sackville Street, and the report of the various types of arm could be easily distinguished. There were rifles, machine guns [p.50] and very heavy cannon. There was another sound which I could not put a name to, something that coughed out over all the other sounds, a short, sharp bark, or rather a short noise something like the popping of a tremendous cork.

I met D. H. His chief emotion is one of astonishment at the organizing powers displayed by the Volunteers. We have exchanged rumours, and found that our equipment in this direction is almost identical. He says Sheehy Skeffington has been killed. That he was arrested in a house wherein arms were found, and was shot out of hand.

I hope this is another rumour, for, so far as my knowledge of him goes, he was not with the Volunteers, and it is said that he was antagonistic to the forcible methods for which the Volunteers stood. But the tale of his death was so persistent that one is inclined to believe it.

He was the most absurdly courageous man I have ever met with or heard of. He has been in every trouble that has touched Ireland these ten years back, and he has always been in on the generous side, therefore, and [p.51] naturally, on the side that was unpopular and weak. It would seem indeed that a cause had only to be weak to gain his sympathy, and his sympathy never stayed at home. There are so many good people who 'sympathise' with this or that cause, and, having given that measure of their emotion, they give no more of it or of anything else. But he rushed instantly to the

street. A large stone, the lift of a footpath, the base of a statue, any place and every place was for him a pulpit; and, in the teeth of whatever oppression or disaster or power, he said his say.

There are multitudes of men in Dublin of all classes and creeds who can boast that they kicked Sheehy Skeffington, or that they struck him on the head with walking sticks and umbrellas, or that they smashed their fists into his face, and jumped on him when he fell. It is by no means an exaggeration to say that these things were done to him, and it is true that he bore ill-will to no man, and that he accepted blows, and indignities and ridicule with the pathetic candour of a child who is disguised as a man, and whose disguise cannot come off. His tongue, his pen, his [p.52] body, all that he had and hoped for were at the immediate service of whoever was bewildered or oppressed. He has been shot. Other men have been shot, but they faced the guns knowing that they faced justice, however stern and oppressive; and that what they had engaged to confront was before them. He had no such thought to soothe from his mind anger or unforgiveness. He who was a pacifist was compelled to revolt to his last breath, and on the instruments of his end he must have looked as on murderers. I am sure that to the end he railed against oppression, and that he fell marvelling that the world can truly be as it is. With his death there passed away a brave man and a clean soul.

Later on this day I met Mrs. Sheehy Skeffington in the street. She confirmed the rumour that her husband had been arrested on the previous day, but further than that she had no news. So far as I know the sole crime of which her husband had been guilty was that he called for a meeting of the citizens to enrol special constables and prevent looting. [p.53]

Among the rumours it was stated with every accent of certitude that Madame Markievicz had been captured in George's Street, and taken to the Castle. It was also current that Sir Roger Casement had been captured at sea and had already been shot in the Tower of London. The names of several Volunteer Leaders are mentioned as being dead. But the surmise that steals timidly from one mouth

flies boldly as a certitude from every mouth that repeats it, and truth itself would now be listened to with only a gossip's ear, but no person would believe a word of it.

This night also was calm and beautiful, but this night was the most sinister and woeful of those that have passed. The sound of artillery, of rifles, machine guns, grenades, did not cease even for a moment. From my window I saw a red flare that crept to the sky, and stole over it and remained there glaring; the smoke reached from the ground to the clouds, and I could see great red sparks go soaring to enormous heights; while always, in the calm air, hour after hour there was the buzzing and rattling and thudding of guns, and, but for the guns, silence. [p.54]

It is in a dead silence this Insurrection is being fought, and one imagines what must be the feeling of these men, young for the most part, and unused to violence, who are submitting silently to the crash and flame and explosion by which they are surrounded.
